

Mills & Boon Classics

Kathryn Blair

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Gwen Crosland came to Mozambique to help her uncle in his battle against his in-laws over his young son's future, She had not reckoned on conflict with the boy's godfather, the powerful Duque Renaldo Marcus de Condeiro. And she never dreamed she would fall in love with her enemy!

## CHAPTER ONE

"It was as well that you came by sea," said Uncle George as he started the car and they moved away from the harbour. "That way, you see so many strange sights and skin colours that by the time you arrive at Beira everything seems almost normal."

Gwen laughed. "I wouldn't say that, though it's helped me to get used to the heat. But I wouldn't have missed the voyage for anything! Do you come often to the coast?"

"Haven't the time for it, I'm afraid. Vasco comes with his aunt and occasionally with the Duque, but I'm lucky if I can take my annual month's holiday all in one piece. Actually, it's well over a year since I had a vacation myself."

"You're as bad as Father. About May, I arrange a holiday for him and Mother at some little spot in Devon, and every couple of weeks after that I have to write and postpone it for a few days, so that he *may* get away by the end of September. And he's not a G.P., as you are!"

"He's doing something he enjoys, and that takes care of half the battle of life." Uncle George swung the car round a corner, drove gently along a quiet residential road which led out of the shimmering little port on the edge of the Indian Ocean. He added, with a smile that was very like her father's, "This visit of yours means a great deal to me, Gwen. I've never asked outright for you or Monica to come out, but I've hoped for a long time that your father would take the hint from my letters."

She looked at him with frank hazel eyes. "He did, really, but you know how we were placed. Monica decided she must go to university, and I was the only one at home. He could have engaged a receptionist-secretary sort of person, but it hardly seemed fair that with two daughters he should be driven to rely on a stranger."

"Is your mother still as decorative and worldly?"

There was no irony in his question, but Gwen became at once defensive. "It's not Mother's fault that she isn't an ideal doctor's wife. There's no comfier home in England than ours, and she's a marvellous cook. I know it was because of Mother that Daddy gave up general practice and specialized in radiology, but now he's glad. He's quite an important man at Chesterham Hospital."

"I'm sure of it, my dear. Your mother doesn't have to be a good doctor's wife; she merely has to be there in his house when he comes in tired and in need of understanding." His glance at her was half-smiling. "I suppose you were all alarmed when I married a Portuguese woman? You'd only have been about ten, of course, but your parents would have talked about it."

"We weren't alarmed," she said warmly. "We were only terribly sorry for you when .. when she died."

"Yes," he said simply, the smile gone. "I needed sympathy just then. It's appalling to be a doctor and unable to save your own loved one. Perhaps I felt it more because I was forty-three before I married."

"Fortunately," she said softly, "you had Vasco."

"I must tell you more about him presently. After all, he's the reason you're here."

"But I'm so glad to see *you*, Uncle George. You know, even after twenty years out here, you're a complete Crosland!"

"I daresay I have more white hairs than my brother."

"A few, and you're browner, but you don't really look older. After all, there are only two years between you."

"Monica is about two years older than you, isn't she?"

Gwen nodded, a little soberly. "And much better looking." She quickly left the subject of Monica. "Tell me about the country as we go through it. How many miles is it to Cedrillo?"

"About sixty, and the countryside changes quite a bit. The Cedrillo district is famous for timber and cocoa, but before we get there we go through kaffir-corn and millet lands, and there are one or two sugar estates. Coconut palms grow here like weeds, of course, and you'll see plenty of them among the bush by the roadside."

For more than half an hour their conversation was of this amazing country of Mozambique. Gwen gazed, entranced, at groups of palms, at grasses six feet high, at undulating acres of waving green sugar cane, at dense plantations of bananas and pineapples. The wind loosened a tress of the soft, wheat-gold hair, and she tucked it back among the other short wavy hair, which was growing damp with perspiration. But she was not fully aware of the afternoon heat; there was too much else here that was strange and absorbing.

Ten years ago George Crosland had married a woman of thirty-four who was a member of a very old and esteemed Portuguese family. Normally, the marriage of one of their exalted number to a humble medico would have shocked the family, but Luisa had arrived at an age when Portuguese women are normally almost matrons, and George Crosland happened to be respected and British, even if his earnings were meagre by their standards. The family overlooked the differences of race and background, the marriage took place and for five years it was ideally happy. Vasco had been nearly three when his mother died suddenly, and now, Gwen knew, he was eight and a bone of contention. But she was still foggy about the details.

When Uncle George had first hinted that he would like one of his nieces to come out to Mozambique for a month or two, his brother

had barely registered the fact. Over the past eighteen months or so there had been further references to Vasco and his need of an English education, but Gwen's father had been busy, he had had only one daughter at home, and perhaps it had seemed to him that George should have put his foot down with these foreign relatives of his who insisted on dictating Vasco's future.

If it hadn't been for Monica, poor Uncle George would still be wondering if it would ever be possible to obtain assistance from England for his motherless son. Gwen veered away once more from thoughts of her sister. Some time soon she might manage an objective slant upon the business of Monica and Howard Greer, but until then there could be no profit in mulling the thing over. The facts were indisputable. Howard had told Gwen he loved her, and the whole world had been apple blossom and blue heaven and magical moments. Then Monica had come home, minus a degree but full of pep and loveliness, and somehow Howard had shifted on to another wavelength ... Monica's.

Her mother, Gwen recalled, had been singularly insensitive about the whole thing. Her father, on the other hand, had been angry, but inarticulate because there was so little he could do about it. Another of Uncle George's letters had arrived, and almost before Gwen realized what was happening her parents were seeing her off at Southampton; and on the liner, where flirtations were ten a penny, her own hurt had lessened. Gwen meant it to keep on diminishing.

"I hoped," she said now, "that you'd bring Vasco to meet me. In his picture he looks a handsome young scamp."

"So he is, and when he grows up he'll be a lady-killer. I didn't bring him because he happens to be staying with his aunt. Today, I believe, he and some other children are guests of the Duque."

"You've never mentioned this Duque person in your letters. Who is he?"

He laughed a little. "Personage - not person. Renaldo Marcos de Condeiro, owner of most of Cedrillo and resident at the Quinta Condeiro. He has a castle in Portugal, where he lives for half the year. His people have owned Cedrillo for nearly two hundred years and the Quinta is one of the oldest manorial houses in the country. Renaldo is Vasco's godfather."

"Good heavens. Imagine a Crosland having a Portuguese duke for a godfather!"

"It's great for the boy, but a headache to me. You see, Luisa's family, the Paivas, are connected in a way with the Condeiro family, of which the Duque is the head. It's not even remotely a blood relationship - a Paiva ancestor came to Cedrillo with the first Duque de Condeiro, and the family has been honoured with a close friendship ever since. Luisa was intensely thrilled when the Duque consented to act as godfather to Vasco, and I was quite pleased myself; it was a great privilege. I wouldn't have been happy about it, though, if I'd known what it could mean. The Portuguese take that sort of responsibility far more seriously than we do in England. During the past few years the Paivas and the Duque have appropriated Vasco and I've been powerless."

"But he lives with you, doesn't he?"

"Most of the time." His shoulders lifted and he said paternally, "I'm not going to worry you with all this the moment you arrive. There's nothing terribly urgent about it and we'll have to act together - but not until you feel a little at home and able to understand the situation." He paused, and added seriously, "You're young, Gwen, and I won't ask too much of you. Merely having another Crosland here with me will be a great help."



"But I want to do all I can," she said. "And you'd be surprised how much I've already taken in. Tell me about this duke. Hasn't he any children of his own?"

"He's not married, worst luck. He's thirty-four, charming and magnificently arrogant. I honestly believe he feels a child couldn't wish for anything more than to be born into or near the Condeiro family. He thinks my whole outlook as far as Vasco is concerned is narrow and sentimental rather than for the boy's good." He sighed. "The trouble with the man is that somehow he always gets his own way while seeming to agree with one."

"He sounds obnoxious!"

"If he were, I could deal with him," said her uncle ruefully. "You may not meet him for some time, but when you do, you'll realize what I'm up against. Much though I'd hate to upset Luisa's family, I'd go ahead with my plans for Vasco if it weren't for the Duque. He kills my ideas stone dead with hardly more than a smile. And of course he's Vasco's hero."

"But you're his father! Uncle George, you've been letting them sit on you!"

He smiled at her affectionately. "So I have - because I didn't have someone like you to pitch into me. Gwen, you don't know how glad I am that it's you and not Monica who's come out to give me a hand. At first, I rather hoped for your sister because she's older and I remember that even as a child she was shrewd and outspoken. But you'll go down better with Vasco; he has to be persuaded as well, you see, and that can only be done by someone who's really sincere. Not that I know enough about Monica to say she isn't," he ended hastily. "I merely added up a few things - her nature as I recalled it, and her going to university instead of taking her turn as your father's secretary. I suppose she's doing that job now?"

"Partly, but a retired nursing Sister my father knows has stepped in, so Monica will soon have nothing to do." Gwen added, "You haven't said what you really want for Vasco."

He shrugged, with a touch of humour. "It's quite something to be able to discuss it without a shutter sliding down. I want Vasco to be free eventually to choose his own way of life. He can only do that if he's educated in England, and in my opinion it would be best for him to start there while he's young. I'm not rich, but I can afford to have him trained for any career he might want, and above everything he must be free to make his choice. You can probably see many of the reasons why I was so keen to get one of my own family out here."

"Oh, yes," she said at once. "What you'd really like is for him to cotton to me, so that I can take him home with me. Then Father could get him into a good school and he'd spend the holidays with us."

"Except the long vacation, when he could come out here by air."

"I think your idea is splendid!"

"So do I," he told her with a smile, "but we're the only two who like it. Unfortunately, he's the only male grandchild in the Paiva family - they didn't even have a son of their own - and the Duque is naturally on their side. In a discreet and elegant manner they're fighting to keep Vasco here in Mozambique."

"Well, I think it's wrong of them. As his father, you're the one to plan his future. Legally, you could ignore them!"

"But for Vasco's sake, I can't. He's fond of his grandparents and they dote on him. He's amply provided for in their wills, but a will can be altered if he displeases them, and as I'm merely a salaried doctor I have to consider such things. Quite a complex business, isn't it?"

She nodded, staring thoughtfully at a grove of mangoes they were passing. "Does Vasco attend school?"

"He learns with his two girl cousins, from a governess. That's one of the things I dislike."

"I would, too." She paused. "I suppose the position, really, is this. You want an English future for him ..."

"Not necessarily. But I want him to know England through and through before he makes a final decision about his career."

"Well, you do want him to have an English education. These Paivas and the noble duke intend to keep him here, if they can, so that England will seem to him to be a foreign country. If you upset them by insisting on your rights he may lose his inheritance."

"And the patronage of the Duque."

"Patronage!"

Her uncle laughed. "I don't mean it that way. You've a lot to learn about this country. Gwen. Renaldo de Condeiro is genuinely fond of Vasco, and there's also the fact of his being the boy's godfather. Here, in the middle and upper classes, it's not unusual for the godparent to be in on all parental discussions. The fact that Vasco has no mother increases the Duque's importance; being connected with her family, he takes her place. I've had to accept it. The best I can hope for at present is that Renaldo will gradually agree to Vasco's having a year or two of schooling in England. Even that hope, I may say, is based on a vast uncertainty! But as I said before, I am determined not to hurry things and create a muddle. How long can you stay with me, my dear?"

"Six or eight weeks, I think." She leant towards him, confidentially, said sweetly and with a touch of mischief, "I'll promise you something, Uncle George. When I leave Cedrillo I'll take Vasco with me, and even your horrid Duque will bestow his blessing!"

"That's the spirit," he said, "but you'll need heaps of it. Until you've been here a few days you won't realize just how impossible the whole thing is. Still, that's enough for your first couple of hours in the country." He waved a hand. "We're entering the Cedrillo district. Orchards to begin with, then timber forests on one side of the road and cocoa trees on the other. In about twenty minutes you'll see the town."

The town of Cedrillo was not impressive, but it had a warm and languid atmosphere. At four-thirty in the afternoon it had scarcely roused from midday slumber and only a few young men were abroad, sitting perhaps at a cafe table under an umbrella or cycling lazily down the street towards a rendezvous. The shops round the square were heavily shaded either by cement porticos or by thick canvas awnings, and Gwen noticed that the sign called the square the *Praca Condeiro*.

"This is the hub of the town," her uncle explained. "This main thoroughfare - it may look sleepy to you, but it's important to us! - is the *Avenida da Republica*. A few more shops, government buildings, business premises, a few old houses . . . and out we go towards the suburbs."

"That's Cedrillo, that was," she murmured.

"And here we are," he said. "The medico's house. You'll find it cool inside."

To Gwen, it was a delightful bungalow. George Crosland had himself had the place built soon after his arrival twenty years ago, and his

ideas had been sufficiently advanced so that today it was not in the least old-fashioned. There was a square central hall, and to the left a sitting room furnished with good dark Portuguese pieces and blue and pale yellow linen. A small recess at the end of the living room made a dining nook, into which a hatch opened from the kitchen, and when necessary the dining nook could be shut off by closing the blue curtains.

To the right of the hall a room of similar dimensions to that of the sitting room had been converted into a small office and consulting room which had a patient's entrance on the side veranda. The three large bedrooms were at the back, and all looked out over a garden which, Gwen thought as she gazed from her own window, must have been perfected by Uncle George's Portuguese wife. It was a formal garden of flower beds in a green lawn which was edged by a dwarf clipped evergreen, and its background of oleanders and magnolias, flowering peaches, frangipani and datura was just the right foil for the formality. Gwen had a thing about gardens; this one she loved at sight.

She had a quick wash and changed into a flowered cotton which was low at the neck and trimmed with white, hung away a few dresses, and rather apprehensively allowed the dark-skinned servant to carry away a couple of suits that needed pressing.

She walked along the corridor to the hall, stood there a moment looking out of the open door at polished steps and another lawn, and then walked into the sitting room. It was dim, and without waiting for her vision to correct itself she crossed to the window and pulled up the venetian blind. And there on the wide window-sill lay a bouquet of golden roses. Gwen had never seen anything like them.

Gently, she took them into her hands and bent to catch their scent. It was a remarkable perfume, like that of English roses but with something added - almost that extra something might have been the

exotic scent of lemon flowers. She turned round with sudden awareness, stared unbelievably at the tall, dark, debonair man who stood watching her as though she were some unusual but interesting type of domestic pet. He was wide-browed and narrow-jawed, his skin was sallow and rather tightly drawn over his high cheekbones in a way that stamped him alien to the English, his eyes were an unexpected penetrating grey, but his mouth smiled, so that he looked charming and slightly mocking and watchful at the same time. At that moment, Gwen was unable to take in the immaculate beige sportswear, the midnight-blue silk cravat, the heavy seal ring on the small finger of the right hand.

"Good afternoon," she said, firmly quelling the flurry in her veins. "I expect you want my uncle. He found a couple of patients waiting for him. I'm Gwen Crosland."

"So I thought." The heels clicked as he bowed, the voice was foreign and dangerously pleasant. "I came to see your uncle and also to make your acquaintance, Miss Crosland." Again a slight inclination of the dark shining head. "Renaldo de Condeiro - at your service."

Oh, help - the Duque!

"How do you do." For the life of her Gwen did not know what to add. Somewhat confusedly, she indicated the tea tray. "Would you care to join us?"

"Thank you, no." The grey glance slipped over her hair and the fair skin, rested momentarily on the bouquet she still held. "You like the roses?"

"Very much." She took stern control of herself. "Did you bring them?"

"From the Quinta gardens," he said negligently. "I thought roses because you are English, and this particular kind because they are grown only here in Cedrillo. You could not grow them in England. It is strange they should have your golden colouring - no? Perhaps the fact has some significance."

"Significance?" She wished she didn't feel such an idiot. "What significance could it possibly have?"

A deep shrug. "Who knows? You may wonder whether the rose is not an improvement in tint and perfume upon your English varieties. This is a land of sunshine and colour, and this rose was perfected here; it would not transplant easily to a cold climate."

There might be a double meaning in that, but Gwen was in no condition to probe for it. Gently, she laid the roses on the table, clenched one hand rather tightly to remind herself that this was the annoying imperious Duque who held Uncle George's happiness and Vasco's future in his fine-boned hands.

She said politely, "Would you like me to call my uncle, senhor?"

"I can wait a few minutes," he said casually. "Please sit down."

For all the world as if he were giving her permission in her uncle's house! Somehow, however influential he might be, she couldn't obey him. She stood near the tray and poured a cup of tea, was ultra-careful how she moved under the appraising grey glance.

"If you don't drink tea perhaps you would like some coffee, senhor?"

"No coffee, thank you. I do drink tea, quite often." And then, with faint satire, "We are fairly civilized here in Cedrillo."

She flashed a look at him, dropped a cube of sugar into her cup. "I merely thought the habit of tea-drinking might be unusual among the Portuguese," she said coolly.

"So? But it was we Portuguese who gave tea to the English! It was not known in England till our Catherine of Braganza imported tea into the court of your Charles the Second."

"I know, but the custom thrived in England and it has never thrived on the Continent. One has to try things before they can be proved."

"Ah." His smile was amused and, Gwen had grudgingly to admit, not unattractive in the least! "You feel that other Portuguese ... things could grow better in England? It is an interesting study, that." But the aloof lift of his shoulders showed that at the moment he was disinclined for such a study. His mouth, well-cut and firm, looked a little hard in spite of the smile. "Tell me, Miss Crosland, did you have a good journey from England?"

"It was grand. My first long sea trip."

"You feel you will enjoy Mozambique?"

"Oh, yes. If all goes well I'll get in a few days at Lourenco Marques before I leave."

"And you stay - how long?"

"A few weeks. At the moment I'm not sure."

A brief silence. Then, "You are a very youthful ally for your uncle, senhorita," he said calmly. "What is your age?"

"Nearly twenty-one."

"And in England, I believe, you help your doctor father?"



"Yes."

"Here, I suppose, you are hoping to help Doctor Crosland?"

"Yes, senhor," she said with decision.

"Good. It will be interesting." But just slightly his eyes had narrowed. However, he left the subject, said carelessly, "You must learn much of Cedrillo while you are here. Africa *is* by no means so backward as you might think."

Before Gwen could reply the door across the hall opened and closed, and her uncle came into the sitting room. At the sight of his visitor he hesitated, but there could be no ignoring the outstretched hand, the warm smile of the Duque.

"So you are back from Beira, my good doctor. It was only at midday that I learned you had gone to meet your niece from England."

The doctor lifted an eyebrow. "I told you last week my niece was on her way."

"But you wished to keep her exact date of arrival quiet. It is comprehensible," the Duque said tolerantly.

"I hope you and Gweneth have introduced yourselves?"

"So it is Gweneth - prettier than Gwen, I think. Yes, we are now acquainted." He moved nonchalantly into the doorway. "Have your tea, doctor. I called only to welcome your niece and to invite you both to the Quinta for dinner tomorrow. There will be other guests, but we shall no doubt have time for a talk about the plans for the new hospital."

"You haven't mentioned Vasco. Have the children had a good day?"

"I left them at tea in the terrace. I will take Vasco back to his aunt at six. He is very well."

Gwen heard herself saying, "Couldn't he come straight here? I'm longing to meet him."

The Duque's magnetic glance was veiled. "Here, we do not act impulsively, Miss Crosland. It has been agreed that Vasco should stay with his mother's sister till the end of the month; it would not be correct to offend her by cutting short this visit." He bowed with a worldly and very masculine grace. "*Adeus*, doctor ... senhorita. Tomorrow night at eight."

He was gone, and through the window Gwen saw a long white car glide away towards the road. She turned startled eyes to her uncle.

"My, oh, my!" she said expressively.

His look was rueful but humorous! "Well, there you have it. The man himself. Makes you a little less sure of your own powers, doesn't he?"

She poured tea for him. "He's like a handsome statue with electric wiring," she said. "Does he ever simply come to the point?"

"About most things, yes."

"But the very mention of Vasco works that shutter you were telling me about. I don't like the man, Uncle George!"

"Oh, come now." Her uncle was laughing. "He's the most popular Duque they've had here. The people are wild about him, and Portuguese women nearly swoon when he smiles at them as he smiled at you when he left."

"I'm certain he doesn't smile at them like that!"

"Well, perhaps not. With them he's completely the Duque de Condeiro, whereas with you he's something more - an exceedingly charming man squelching an enemy."

"Does he know why I'm here?"

"I haven't told him; or anybody. But Renaldo knows I invited you and he's astoundingly astute. In any case, he realizes you're bound to line up on my side."

"Does he consider *you* an enemy?"

"No - merely misguided." He threw out his hands in a gesture he must have learned from the Portuguese. "All in good time, Gwen. May I have another cup of tea? And tell me what you think of the house."

The Duque was forgotten, or nearly forgotten. So disturbing a presence could not be dispelled by mere conversation. Indeed, even after her uncle had gone back to his surgery, and the soft-footed servant had removed the tray, Gwen's nostrils seemed to catch a wisp of that individual male fragrance, and she couldn't help reflecting upon that smiling charm; undoubtedly he was a man who conducted all his affairs, including those of the heart, with complete sophistication. Now why should she think about him in that way? Perhaps it was the roses.

She wandered round the house again and out into the garden. Evening came down, soft and dark and scattered with stars. The air was heady with flower scents, she smelled distant wood-smoke and heard the increasing riot of noise from awakened insects. Beetles whirred, cicadas set up a chorus, an occasional monkey chattered.

I'm actually here in Mozambique, she thought. They're all over there in Chesterham - Mother and Father, Monica and ... and Howard.

She felt light and happy, much happier than at any time during the past two months, since Monica had come home to stay. Strangely, she didn't even mind thinking about Monica, though she found singularly little to reflect upon in that direction. Her sister wasn't in love with Howard; Gwen was sure of that. Monica had merely come home to find life a wee bit dull, and Howard's sudden interest, considering he had already attached himself to Gwen, rather flattering. Just as, in earlier days, she had appropriated Gwen's better skipping rope or exchanged Gwen's scarcely-touched box of chocolates for her own depleted one, Monica, on her first evening at home, had taken charge of Howard and magnanimously released for Gwen her own uninteresting escort. And things had gone on in that way.

But none of it was very important now. Gwen had a job to do - a tricky one - and she could feel her blood warming towards it with a strange excitement. It was going to be great to slide Vasco right out from under the arrogant nose and alert grey eyes of the Duque de Condeiro.

Next morning she awoke to a sunrise that thrilled with beauty. Leaves glistened with dew, flowers were bloomed with it and the sky was cerulean streaked with magenta.

She had breakfast in the dining recess with her uncle, did some dusting while he was up at the mission, and lunched with him in the veranda. Afterwards, while he rested, she wrote home. She had posted a letter on the ship the night before last, but now that she had arrived she had heaps to tell them, though she could say little about Vasco. She paused in her writing to reflect what a pity it was that she couldn't yet meet the boy. Uncle George had agreed, but he thought it best to wait.

"You see, being alone here is not really good for Vasco," he told her. "With his aunt he has more company - two little girl cousins and other relatives in and out. I think they spoil him a little, but they're strict, too, in some ways, so he's fairly disciplined. I go there only to take him and bring him back."

"But we still have a week to wait till the end of the month!"

"It's not long. I've waited two years to get you here. And, anyway, whether Vasco is here or not makes no difference to the actual set-up."

Which was true. There was nothing to stop Gwen exploring every aspect of her uncle's reasons for bringing her to Mozambique. And even on that first day she began to understand how he was placed and how the Englishman in him revolted against seeing his son reared in a foreign environment. Had his wife lived it would have been different, because the boy would have been always at home and his guidance half-English, and possibly the boy's mother would have agreed to his being educated at least partly in England. But these relations...

Gwen shook her head and put the letter away; she would finish it tomorrow. The truth was, she found herself decidedly unsettled about the evening ahead. What did one wear for dinner in a *Portuguese mansion*? Was there a special code of behaviour among these people? Every nerve in her body was singularly averse to the idea of bending the knee to the noble Renaldo, yet if she wanted her own and her uncle's way over Vasco, she had to do her utmost to please the man. As to how to please him... well, she would have to rely on her instincts.

That evening she wore a dark blue silk dress, a double row of pearls and plain black shoes. The outfit was elegantly nondescript, she thought - the sort of combination in which to feel one's way. As she

slipped into the car beside her uncle at ten minutes to eight, she felt excited and adventurous. Dinner at the house of a duke! This was really going to be something to write home about.

The town of Cedrillo was sparsely lighted, except here and there where a cafe spilled over the pavement. They ran through and out on to a road which quickly left houses behind. There were palms against a star-studded sky, a forest, and then lower trees, which Uncle George said were cacao. A left turn along a well-kept gravel road till they came to an ornate wall that was divided at the road by iron gates which stood open.

"This is the drive up to the Quinta," said Uncle George. "The wall encloses the private estate. You can't see it now, but there's parkland and old trees at each side, till you come to flowering shrubs and trees and long flower beds. Ah, here we are - smell the blossoms?"

"Yes - I can see them, too. It's too big for one man; I'm sure there are parts of the garden he never sees."

"Renaldo would never deny anyone the pleasure of walking round the place. By the way, before we get there I'd better warn you. He's used to Portuguese women who agree with everything he says, and perhaps you'd better start that way, too. Don't forget that this is your first contact with Portuguese society!"

Yet it was odd, but the first person Gwen spoke to in the grounds of the Quinta Condeiro was an Englishman. He approached them in an old grey station wagon, slowed and drew level, to stop. Looking beyond her uncle, Gwen saw a thin brown face under a worn felt hat that was rakishly belted with a strip of leopard skin. It wasn't a particularly strong face, but it had a nonchalant smile and light blue eyes which were seamed at the corners through squinting in sunlight.

"Hi," he said. "How goes it, Doc?"

"Not so bad." Uncle George turned smilingly to Gwen. "This is Colin Reed, game hunter and ne'er-do-well. He plagues us every so often." To the man he said, "My niece, Gwen, from England."

The man leaned from his seat and looked through at her. "How do, Gwen. She's pretty, Doc. Care to ask me over?"

"Come to lunch tomorrow. Staying long in these parts?"

"I don't know. I've been trying to interest His Excellency in a safari, but it's no dice." He sighed, but not very deeply. "He gave me a drink and shoved off, but I'll try him again in a few days. Got to, or starve."

"As serious as that?"

"Not really," he said lazily, "but Renaldo does pay well and he's a good shot, so I get a fair rake-off from skins, too. You going to some binge up there at the castle?"

"Castle?" echoed Gwen.

"Just *my fun*," Colin explained with a jaded grin. "You see, this wagon is my home, so I have a rather warped view even of bungalows." He leaned forward again, to look her over. "You know, you strike me as the sort of gal who might listen to a man's troubles. Care to hear mine?"

"I know them already. You're careless and spendthrift, you have no home and no one who cares a button about you."

"There now," he said admiringly. "I couldn't have put it better myself. I must certainly get to know you!"

"We must move along," stated the doctor mildly. "See you tomorrow at about a quarter to one, Colin."

"Right. You might put in a word for me with the Duque if you get the chance. I can certainly use a fat fee! Goodnight."

They parted, but Gwen was still smiling. "So we have an Englishman in the district," she said. "He looks like someone out of a film, but he has something."

"Not much," her uncle commented tolerantly. "He wastes his life and he's just a shade too intelligent to enjoy doing it. But he doesn't let it worry him. If he cared to reform a little he could go home and take his place in the family business."

"Does he really live in that station wagon?"

"Pretty well. He has it fixed up with a bed at one side and a storage box on the other. About every two months he calls for his mail at the post office in Beira, but apart from that he wanders. Doesn't do much shooting himself, but he takes out safaris. The game country starts about fifty miles north of Cedrillo."

"What an odd life!"

"He chose it. Colin likes the role of misfit; it lets him out of responsibilities."

There was no time for further discussion. The drive had curved, and now Gwen saw a sight that caught at her breath. The Quinta Condeiro blazed with lights, and at first she was unable to see its lines against the surrounding trees.

Then she became aware that the car had turned between arched portals into a square courtyard where a fountain played, and she saw that the house was built around three sides of the courtyard, with the main entrance at the far end. And what an entrance it was! Pillared and magnificently sculptured with a coat-of-arms above the door,



long Gothic windows which showed glimpses of figures and sparkling chandeliers. Three long, shallow, carpeted steps into a reception hall which had columns of pink-veined marble supporting a baroque ceiling, elaborately carved chairs with blue damask seats, a long refectory table which held three urns of orange lilies and white magnolias.

And here was the Duque, immaculate in formal dress, the distinguished head held high as he bowed and bestowed upon them that lofty and warm yet calculating smile.

"Ah, good evening, Miss Crosland ... and my good doctor!" He looked at her shining, uncovered head. "You bring no wrap, senhorita?"

"It's so warm that I'm afraid I didn't."

"You must please yourself, of course. Our women use a lace covering, but I know it is not usual in England. However, perhaps next time ..." He charmingly left it there and led them into an immense drawing room, where about a dozen others were gathered, talking quietly in small groups.

Renaldo left the doctor at one of the groups and took Gwen on a tour of introduction. She caught a few of the names, but they were too foreign to absorb quickly. Until she came to Senhor and Senhora Freitas. The Senhora was small and dark and without expression.

"The aunt of your young cousin," Renaldo elaborated with the utmost courtesy. "Vasco is at this moment sleeping at the house of Senhora Freitas."

Gwen smiled delightedly. "Is he? I'm so glad to know you, senhora, and just longing to meet Vasco!"

The woman nodded discreetly. "He knows you are here." But there was no invitation.

Gwen passed on and was left with a rather stilted young couple who painfully made conversation in English while she sipped a cocktail. She would write to her father about the paintings on the ceilings, the Aubusson tapestries on the walls, the blinding beauty of the chandeliers, but her mother would be more interested in the Chinoiserie painted all over the magnificent black cabinet, the hand-embroidered muslin curtains and the heavy damask drapes between the windows.

The dining room, she discovered later, was equally splendid but in a different manner. Down the endless length of the table, glass and cutlery gleamed, the carved chairs with their white silk seats were geometrically set at each place. Here, the chandeliers had not been wired, and dozens of real candles sent a perfect warm glow throughout the room.

Gwen saw Renaldo showering *his* charm upon *the* very erect old lady on his left, speaking with ease and a diabolical self-assurance to the men. He was terribly foreign in his mannerisms, and tantalizingly aware of his position among these people. Gwen found herself growing a little angry at the thought that they would no doubt allow him to dictate even their private lives if he wished.

Somehow, when coffee and liqueurs were served in the drawing room she felt restless. Intuitively she knew that her uncle was not accepted here because he was a doctor, but because he happened to be the father of Vasco. After all, he had no patients among these people. The Freitas couple, she noticed, took good care to keep away from Uncle George, and from being a little angry, she grew quite hot about it.

Then suddenly someone brought a message from the mission for Dr. Crosland.

"I'm so sorry, senhor," said Uncle George to the Duque, "but Gwen and I must leave. Thank you for a most enjoyable evening."

"It is a pity that you have to go, but one understands how it is for a doctor," said Renaldo with a smiling shrug. "But leave your niece. She will be taken home."

At eleven the guests began to leave. Renaldo saw each car depart and came back into the hall for further good-nights. Gwen sat waiting resignedly for instructions.

And eventually he said, "These who are last to leave have to drive some distance into the country. I will drive you myself, Miss Crosland."

Something more for her letter home, she thought flippantly, as she walked out with him and slipped into the front seat of the dashing white car. "The Duque de Condeiro took me home. If you were the mindless sort you could fall for him like a ninepin on looks alone, but I sat next to the handsomest, richest, and most courteous man you ever saw, and felt nothing whatever!" Except perhaps an interesting antagonism.

The Duque set the car moving, said coolly, "You are amused, Miss Crosland?"

"Amused?"

"You are smiling a little."

"I'm afraid I do that," she apologized. "I was adding a few lines in my mind to the letter I shall post home tomorrow."

"They were about this evening at the Quinta?"

"Well... it *has* been quite an experience."

"But not entirely a pleasant one, ha?" He did not wait for her reply, but added in the same cool tones, "Tonight we will say no more, but soon I must correct these impressions you have gained. You may assure yourself, *senhorita*, that what we do for Vasco is not only for his good but for the good of others. You cannot come here from England and change our world. We have our plans for the boy - plans which you cannot understand or alter. We wish you to enjoy your stay in Cedrillo, but you can make no difference here. I insist upon your realizing that."

Oh, you do, thought Gwen, at once militant. But just in time she remembered that her battle was lost the moment she became outwardly incensed with this ... this autocrat.

With admirable calm she said, "You're not very flattering, *senhor*. At least let me believe I may not be forgotten when I'm gone."

"No one is forgotten, least of all someone who is young and pretty and unusual," he said. "There is nothing personal, I assure you."

They sped through a silence. Then she asked, very carefully, "Have you ever seen yourself in my uncle's position? It's the only way to understand how he feels about his son."

"I agree. But your uncle was aware of his obligations when he married Luisa Paiva. The doctor is a good man and I respect him. But he married a Portuguese woman. If I married an Englishwoman and made my home in England, I would expect my children to grow up in England."

She gave a small laugh. "It's impossible to imagine you in that situation, senhor."

"Naturally," he conceded, with a negligent air, "because I am not of a type to marry an Englishwoman."

She looked at him fleetingly. It was true enough. He was too feudal in his ideas and way of living to take on a woman of independence. He might demand a degree of sophistication in a wife but he was definitely a man who had to master his women. Still, he needn't be so imperious about it.

"You can't blame me for wanting to help my uncle to get what he feels is right for Vasco."

"I do not blame you, senhorita," he said suavely, "but I feel I must point out that you will fail. We will discuss this soon and then forget it. I have to go away for a while and I do not wish to leave untidiness behind me."

For the life of her Gwen could not have explained why she put the next question. "Are you going on safari?"

A long moment elapsed before he answered, "I go to Lourenco Marques on business. I presume you asked because you have already met the Englishman, Reed?"

"Tonight, on your drive, as a matter of fact," she said artlessly. "He's broke, poor man."

"I should not pity Reed, if I were you. He is brave among animals but not brave enough to take his place in the world. Certainly he is not a fit companion for a girl of your age."

"I haven't led a sheltered existence."

"By that you mean you have known many men?"

"Quite a number."

"In your town of Chesterham?"

He had an excellent memory, this Duque de Condeiro; Uncle George would only have mentioned Chesterham once, she was sure. She nodded. "I grew up there and we have lots of friends."

"But you are too young," he stated, "to have had a lover."

She hesitated a moment too long. "Yes, perhaps I am."

"However," he said shrewdly, "there has been someone, no? Someone who painted the little shadows I saw in your eyes yesterday. Today they are gone, so it is possible that already our warmth is melting the ice caused by this man. I repeat, you are too young to be in love." He swung the car round the bungalow drive and braked, spoke as if his mind were already elsewhere. "I will give myself the pleasure of calling upon you and the doctor before Vasco returns to live with his father."

He got out, and instinctively she knew she should wait for him to open the car door. He went with her into the porch, pushed the door wide but did not follow her in.

She turned. "Thank you for a very interesting evening, senhor."

His eyes narrowed; perhaps he didn't care for the adjective. But his voice was smooth. "It was the greatest pleasure in the world to have you with us, Miss Crosland. Goodnight."

He was gone, and Gwen caught herself gazing with raised eyebrows at her own reflection above the bowl of golden roses. Drat the man and his sharp, experienced eye! So he had noticed shadows, had he?

Strangely, Gwen had forgotten for the moment her mission here in Cedrillo. She only knew that everything he said, on almost any subject, increased her own feeling of hostility towards the Duque de Condeiro.

## CHAPTER TWO

ON her second morning in Cedrillo, Gwen awoke feeling as if she had lived there for months. There were the boys talking in their own tongue outside in the garden, a perfume from the flowers, the soft wind pushing gently at the curtain and a merry stirring of birds in the trees and climbers. Faintly, she could hear her uncle splashing under the shower, but it was not for some minutes that she remembered her brief talk with the Duque, and its implications.

Twenty minutes later, clad in a fine check gingham and flat white shoes, she walked into the sitting room, where her uncle was waiting for her to join him.

"Good heavens, you do look radiant," he commented. "In this climate it's far more usual for a newcomer to get up looking limp as wet string."

"I feel marvellous. Are you ready for breakfast?"

"I hope you'll keep this up," he said. "It's a tonic to my morale."

She took her place in the dining nook, shook out a napkin. "Does that mean your morale gets low?"

"It does, occasionally." He seated himself and began serving the sliced fruits. "Not very low - just enough to make me annoyed with myself. It's chiefly about Vasco, of course."

"Oh, by the way," she said with a smile, "His Highness brought me home himself last night. On the subject of Vasco he told me to mind my own business."

Uncle George paused, with spoon poised. "Really? I didn't think he'd go as far as that. It was all very polite, I suppose?"



"Oh, yes. He's coming here for a talk some time before Vasco comes home."

"That's odd. You'd think he'd summon us to the Quinta; that's usually his procedure."

"Well, perhaps he will." She nodded her head firmly. "I'm not afraid of that tall handsome grandee ... not much, anyway. And I won't let anything he might say put me off. He means nothing whatsoever to me, but you and Vasco are part of my family!"

"Spoken like a Crosland. But we'll have to be careful, Gwen. No hurrying things up."

"No, of course not. I don't want to go home for weeks!"

"It's funny," he said whimsically, "but I don't feel nearly so bad about it since you've been here. I'm sure there's a way out and that we'll find it together. Don't forget we have Colin Reed coming to lunch."

"I'm looking forward to it!"

And so she was. After her uncle had left for his round of the native village, she went into the kitchen to speak to the servant. He was small and very black and was named Sezuko. There was nothing wooden about Sezuko's appearance; on the contrary, he seemed to have absorbed the Latin quality of smiling acceptance of what could not be altered. His English was sketchy, but he quickly understood that there was to be a guest. There were cold fried chicken and salads of melon and tomato and shredded lettuce. Gwen had already discovered that the local lettuces grew quickly and were tender but without hearts. She took a look at the ice cream in the freezer, nodded when he showed her the big dish of chopped fruits which was chilling in the fridge. With new rolls and butter, cheese and coffee, the lunch would be complete.

At twelve-thirty she heard the grind and rattle of the old station wagon on the drive and went through at once to the sitting room, arriving just as the tall brown man wandered in through the hall.

"Hallo, Mr. Reed," she said. "Come right in. My uncle will be here at any moment."

"Well, well." His light blue gaze rested on the springing waves of her yellow-gold hair, upon her youthful smile. "You're real," he said. "After I'd had a night's sleep I got to wondering."

"I'm real enough. What will you drink?"

"Whisky? I've lived here for some years, but I've never become a wine man."

"Whisky it is."

In daylight, she thought, Colin Reed wasn't at all bad-looking. The lines near his eyes and beside his mouth made him look older than thirty-one, which Uncle George had said was his age, but he had good white teeth and smiling eyes even if the blue was rather light. His hair was platinum with dark streaks of an almost green hue across the top.

"Well, what's the verdict?" he asked companionably.

"Was I staring? I apologize."

"Go ahead and stare. Might do me good to know what a girl straight from England thinks of a chap like me."

"What sort of a chap are you?"

He shrugged, lowered himself, to the arm of a chair and grinned at her. "A low type. At twenty-one I came into a few thousand and

decided to spend it on a spree round the world. I got moving, and I've never been back."

"Haven't you any people?"

"A father and a brother; they're both directors of the family business. I ought to, be one as well, but I can't see myself manufacturing office equipment."

"I can't see you doing it, either."

"Well, that's refreshing, anyway! When I tell people that I ran out on my heritage they call me a heel."

"We're not built to order," she said reasonably, "but I do think it's necessary to conform a little. You seem to have gone to extremes. Do you like game-hunting?"

"I'll tell you something," he said confidentially. "I'm no Safari Sam. I'm not even very good with a gun. It so happened that about six years ago a crowd of tourists were looking about Beira for a guide. I knew the game country - though not very well in those days! - and put on an act because I was needing cash. If they'd been able to read the signs they'd have seen I was nearly as green at tracking lion as they were, but I got through on bluff. Of course, I've gathered quite a bit about it since then. I've learned where to find game and what to do in a tight spot. And almost anyone can organize."

"You're quite an adventurer. What do you do when there are no safaris?"

"Capture a few monkeys and snakes and send them to zoos. It's very easy."

"Is this a bad season?"

He finished his drink and began carelessly to mix another, "You mean because I tried to persuade the Duque to go on a hunt? Are you really interested, or just making conversation till the doc turns up?"

"I'm fascinated. To me, you're a completely new experience."

"Yes, I suppose I am. You're a sweet little girl who's never strayed far *from home*. I like you, Gwen." He returned to the topic. "Just lately I've had an idea cooking, and I can't do anything with it unless I can get a little capital to start it off. The Duque pays a whacking fee, half of it in advance, and I was hoping to use the advance as a deposit on this thing I want. You see, I thought I'd try settling in one place -just to see if I could."

"What's this idea of yours?"

"There's a place down the coast called Cabo Ponto which is beginning to develop as a fishing resort. I was given a piece of land just above a beach. It's worth almost nothing as it is, but if I had enough money to develop it a little - build some sleeping cabins and hire a motor boat for a season - I might attract a number of tourists who like deep-sea fishing."

"So you go in for sea game-hunting as well?"

"I've tried most things and am expert at nothing. Actually, once I knew how to handle the boat I wouldn't have to do much. I'd find out where to go for good fishing, and I could hire someone to do the job for me if I liked."

"It sounds all right," Gwen conceded. "Would the cabins cost much to build?"

"The timber would cost several hundreds, which is more than I can muster at the moment. If the Duque were to engage me for a safari I'd

use the initial payment for timber and get working, so that when I got back the place would be almost ready for opening."

"Haven't you anyone else who might back you?"

"No. I'm afraid game-hunting with a guide is going out of fashion. Never mind. Something invariably turns up - if it's only the next meal!"

She looked at him thoughtfully. "Have you many friends?"

"A few, scattered across eastern Africa. But I wouldn't ask any of them to back me in case I decide some time to cut my losses and get out."

"That's no way to talk before you've even started something," she told him severely. "If you don't think success before the venture, how can you expect to have it?"

"My dear little psychologist..." he began.

But Uncle George poked his head into the sitting room. "Hallo, Gwen. Hallo, Reed. I'll be with you in a moment."

After that, of course, there was no more intimate talk for a while. They lunched together in the nook, had coffee in the dim but heat-laden veranda, and spoke desultorily about the happenings in the Cedrillo district since Colin had last come this way.

When Uncle George had gone off for an hour's rest in his room, Gwen reverted to the subject with Colin.

"I've been thinking about your tourists' cabins. What you really need there is a woman who would make the men so comfortable that they'd want to come again. But it might be a long time before you could afford to hire anyone."

He grinned. "The hiring type of woman doesn't grow in Mozambique."

"Then you should marry."

He winced, theatrically. "You've caught on fairly well but not, completely. The last thing I could take on is a wife."

"Are you sure you can't go ahead with the scheme unless the Duque de Condeiro engages you for a game- hunt?" she asked.

"Either the Duque or someone else who's as well lined. There can't be many."

She looked out at the shimmering garden, and pondered. "Do you know much about the Duque?"

"Only what everyone else knows. He's rolling in it, has a castle and two or three other places in Portugal, he floors the women and keeps them guessing." He looked at her. "How did you get on with him last night?"

"It was grim, really. He knows that I'm here because my uncle is keen to have Vasco taken over to England and educated there. Uncle George wants me to take the child back with me, but I haven't even been allowed to see him yet."

Colin laughed lazily, pulled his right ankle up on to his left knee and lay back untidily. "Get to work on Renaldo. Flash your big greeny-brown eyes at him and quiver those red lips. He's used to dark-eyed, obedient women. Show him what we can produce in England."

She said doggedly, "I refuse to be anyone but myself. He has to see this thing on its merits - that Uncle George has a right to choose his son's place of education and that whatever he chooses should have no

effect on Vasco's grandparents, or on the Duque himself. He probably has dozens of godsons!"

"Give the man a chance-he's only thirty-four, which isn't so old when you're my age. In any case, he doesn't bestow the honour lightly; that's probably why he's so keen on carrying his duty to its limits. I always get fed up when I have to talk to him, but I'd be the first to admit that he's quite a guy."

During the following three days Colin called several times at the bungalow. Once, his excuse was a couple of guinea fowl that he had no means of cooking himself, but on the other occasions he simply looked in, and stayed for a meal. If Gwen had not been occupied with thoughts of Vasco she would have tried to take him in hand; as it was, she merely sewed on a couple of buttons for him, saw him well fed and laughed at his jokes.

It was nearly the end of the month. On Friday, Uncle George would call at the neat pink-and-white house of the Freitas and collect his son, and thereafter Gwen's interests would widen. She was looking forward to it with a wary sort of excitement.

On Thursday evening Colin called in at about six-thirty and stayed for dinner. For once, he had another engagement, and just after nine he drove away, leaving behind him a promise to look in at the weekend.

Soon afterwards, Gwen heard a car on the road, saw its elegant dark shape turn into the drive. It purred round to the front step, and in the porch light she saw the small gold and scarlet crest, and the driver straightening on the path. She wasn't sure whether it was her heart or her throat that plunged; but her wits remained fairly stable.

She touched the collar of the pink dress with tiny black flowers all over it, pushed a swift hand over her hair and went into the hall to open the door.

"Good evening, senhor," she said politely. "Please come in."

The Duque took command, closed the door and bowed her into the sitting room. He was wearing a white dinner jacket and had recently been smoking a cigar; it was part of that faint male fragrance he carried about with him. He was tall and smiling and aloof; the arrogant nose and chin were lifted in a manner that might have been patronizing in someone else, but in the Duque it was merely natural.

"You are well, Miss Crosland?" he asked, as if it mattered more than anything in the world.

She answered reservedly, "Very well, thank you."

His appraisal was kindly and critical. "That is how you look - very fit, very quiet and - what is the word - masked?" He gave a smiling shrug. "No matter. I am here for the little chat with you and your uncle. But do not call him yet. I wish for a word alone with you. Please sit down."

She hesitated, then sank into the corner of the small chesterfield. The Duque hitched his trousers and sat down. He leaned an arm on the table, gave her a brief piercing grey glance which rather belied the practised smile.

Very pleasantly, he said, "You will have the child home tomorrow. We must decide a few things, no?"

"Yes," she said guardedly. "Naturally, he mustn't know that there's any . . . uncertainty about him."



"Ah, you understand perfectly. So far he is a happy child - does that surprise you?"

"Not at all. For an eight-year-old he has a varied and interesting life, and he's lucky enough to be loved rather a lot."

"You agree with me that the feeling of security and of being loved is essential to a child?"

"Absolutely, but I feel Vasco could be equally happy and secure in England."

"You are wrong," he said calmly, "but please go on."

"Well," she said slowly, "to me and to my uncle it's obvious that eventually the boy should choose his own country and career."

"He will be free to do that when he is of an age for it."

"Yes, but if you have your way he'll know no other country but Mozambique!"

"But no. At the age of fourteen he will begin to travel each year for two months."

"I'm not sure that that's good. It doesn't happen to a normal English boy who is the son of a doctor."

"Your uncle practises in Mozambique, and therefore he is not quite the normal English doctor. Tell me, Miss Crosland, has this matter been discussed by your parents?"

"A little. To be honest, my father was rather impatient with Uncle George. He couldn't understand why the Portuguese grandparents should be so important. Now that I'm here, I do understand partly, but it still seems odd that anyone should have more rights where a boy is

concerned than his father. I'm quite certain, senhor, that a son of yours would never in any circumstances be subject to his grandparents or a godfather."

"In that you are right," he conceded with maddening indifference, "but I am a Condeiro. I regret to have to use this persuasion, but financially the good doctor is not well placed. Senhor Paiva and I can do far more for Vasco."

"But does it matter?" she countered quickly. "In England he can have good schooling and a career. There's a fine preparatory school in Chesterham, and Vasco would spend the weekends and holidays with us. I'll soon be twenty-one," she added a little recklessly, "and when I am I'll undertake to look after him in every way that's necessary. I've already made that promise to Uncle George!"

A dark eyebrow lifted slightly, quizzically. "And what if you marry someone who does not care to take such responsibility for another man's son?"

Gwen was halted momentarily, by a sudden memory of Howard. She shook her head and said evenly, "I shan't marry - not for a long time. When I do, I'll marry sensibly - someone who's solid and reliable, even if he's not very spectacular."

"So," smoothly, "you would not marry such a man as Colin Reed?"

She smiled, and said tentatively, "Colin has potentialities. Unfortunately no one has ever taken a personal interest in him."

"Till now?" he asked softly.

"You mean me, senhor?" she said frankly. "The way things are, I haven't time to ponder Colin's problems. I came here to collect my small cousin."

"And if you are unsuccessful - as indeed you will be?"

Gwen looked at the man and felt her sinews begin to tighten. "It's unpardonable to mention this, I suppose, but I feel bound to state that it may take more than you ... your position, to keep Vasco here. It's ridiculous that an English boy of eight should take private lessons from a governess ... and in Portuguese! Apart from the fact that he won't be taught in English, there's also the *things* he'll learn. He'll grow up knowing more about the Portuguese explorers than the English ones, he'll always think in escudos, and have weird ideas about keeping women at home where they belong."

He smiled sharply. "You object to our custom of caring more for our women than is usual in England?"

"No, it's up to the women themselves. But I'm glad I belong to a country where women are free."

He leaned forward slightly and said in clipped accents, "In my opinion, Miss Crosland, you would find it educational to become a member of a Portuguese household for a while." He paused. "I am curious about you. A few moments *ago you spoke of choosing* as a husband someone solid and dependable. Yet you are young and eager, happy to be in a strange country. Why are you not more adventurous in your thoughts of love?"

Her hesitancy was, in its own way, an answer. "Emotions are unpredictable. They can fasten themselves on to the wrong people."

"Such as this man who made you a little unhappy in England?"

Her *shrug was* almost as marked as one of his; she noticed it herself, crossly. "First affairs are always rather devastating, I believe. I've recovered."

"He was just a boy of your age?"

It seemed natural to reply, "He was twenty-seven, musical and sensitive. We went to concerts in London, and to the ballet. We used to get so worked up about the music that we couldn't eat afterwards. Silly, wasn't it?"

"Extremely," he said coolly.

A door of intangible hauteur had closed against her. She saw his head turn at a faint sound from the surgery and knew that this was an intimation that he had nothing more to say to Gwen Crosland. They had not gone far in their discussion of Vasco, but it was far enough for the Senhor Duque. He gave her his distinguished profile for a minute and then stood up.

"Do not disturb your uncle," he said distantly. "There is nothing new on this matter to report to him."

"Very well, senhor."

"Please tell him that I am at his service."

And how, she thought rather sombrely. It was easy to *use* that kind of expression when you knew yourself to be inflexible as steel. Uncle George had been right about the Duque; the man was powerful and entirely convinced that he knew what was best for the boy.

She went with him into the hall, saw his dark head shining under the lamp, the clear planes of his face and the shadows under them. She didn't know that her own face was pale gold and her eyes green in this light.

On the point of a conventional goodnight she stopped, and listened. No mistaking the grinding gear and rattling chassis! The station wagon bucketed round the drive and • came to a halt behind the sleek

black limousine. Colin got out, saw the two framed in the doorway, hesitated and then came right up the steps.

"Good evening, senhor," he said. And then to Gwen, "Left my hat behind me after dinner. It's my lucky piece - never move without it."

"I'll get it," she said quickly.

When she came back and held the hat out to him, the two men were still in the same positions, but Colin looked a little apprehensive.

"Thanks," he said, without moving.

Renaldo measured him, coldly. "You have your hat. Why do you wait, my friend?"

Colin gestured nonchalantly. "Still no chance of a safari, senhor?"

"With me? None at all. Your chances would be better at the coast."

Colin shook his head. "Well, thanks all the same."

He still teetered, and Renaldo shot a quick glance at Gwen. Then he spoke to Colin, abruptly for him. "If you are in difficulty come and see me at the Quinta tomorrow morning at ten. Goodnight."

Surprised into moving towards the steps, Colin answered, "I'll be there. Goodnight, Senhor Duque. Goodnight, Gwennie."

That "Gwennie" seemed to hang on the air like a slowly drifting blanket. The senhor waited till the wagon had backed on to the road, clicked his heels and bowed.

"I do not care for your countryman's manners," he said austere-ly. "Goodnight, Miss Crosland."

She answered him and stepped back into the house. As the car moved away she was closing the door, but there was just a second when she was able to see the man at the wheel. He was looking ahead, as if his mind were already filled with some other matter which had nothing whatever to do with his young godson.

Gwen slipped the bolt, sighed and knocked on the door of the surgery. "Did you hear him?" she asked her uncle. "The great man himself."

"I was so engrossed that I only heard him leave. Didn't he want to see me?"

"Apparently it wasn't necessary." She banged a small fist on his desk. "He makes me so angry! He listens, smiles and answers politely and doesn't budge a fraction. Isn't there just one person who's able to persuade him to climb down a bit - someone I could get in touch with?"

Her uncle laughed a little. "A woman? There's the senhorita everyone's hoping he'll marry. She's been staying with her mother at a country house near Lourenco Marques. Renaldo goes there for a few days soon, and he'll escort them back. No hope there, I'm afraid. Portuguese women only become powerful when they're old."

"A fiancée?" Gwen said, for some reason taken aback. "It's strange, but he gives the impression he'll never marry. Do you know her?"

A shrug. "I've met her, and she's typical of her class. She wouldn't pester Renaldo on our behalf; even if she did he'd gently tell her that the matter was one she could not understand, and that would silence her. You'll have to be patient, Gwen. Our only hope is to wear him down."

She nodded, but was sceptical. You can't wear down a fortress in a few weeks. For quick results a high explosive would be necessary, but where was one to find it in this place?

## CHAPTER THREE

PURPOSELY, Gwen had refrained from questioning her uncle upon Vasco's looks. There were no photographs about the bungalow except the small one of Luisa in Uncle George's bedroom, and because the child was so much in favour with his Portuguese relatives she had visualised him as black-haired, sloe-eyed and olive-skinned. The reality, therefore, was exhilarating.

He came in with his father at lunchtime, a sturdy boy with darkish brown eyes and dark curly hair with red lights in it. His complexion was definitely ruddy, and though his nose was as smooth and perfectly proportioned as his mother's had been, he had the beginnings of a Crosland chin and a squarish jaw. He spoke English with the hesitancy of one who has been using another tongue for some time, but there was no accent, and by the time lunch was over he talked more quickly.

His manners were excellent and he was disconcertingly self-assured. He asked about England intelligently but as if it were a wholly foreign country.

"I believe you have football there, as we do here," he said politely.

Gwen curbed an impulse to state very firmly that it was England who gave football to the world. She smiled. "Oh, yes, and very good football, too. Is it a game you'd like to play, Vasco?"

"Perhaps, but it's difficult here in Cedrillo. At the school in Beira they have teams. Tio Renaldo says so."

"They have teams at English schools, too. In summer they play cricket."



"I've heard of cricket from Father," he said disinterestedly. "It sounds very slow. I like fast games." He forgot sport. "I knew I had some grown-up cousins in England. One day I may visit you there."

"I hope you will, while you're still young." As if in jest she added, "You may even go back with me, if you like."

He grinned, but lifted his shoulders deeply, like a small Renaldo. "I must remain here to start at the school in Beira next term." He looked at his father. "Is it fixed, Papa?"

"Not quite, but don't worry. If you don't go there, you'll go to some other *school* where there are lots of *boys*. That's what you really want, isn't it?"

Vasco nodded. "I expect the first term will seem awfully long without seeing anyone. You will come sometimes, won't you, Papa?"

"Of course, if you're as near as Beira." Uncle George looked uncomfortable and changed the topic. "How long is it since you last saw the Senhor Duque?"

"He came to us yesterday to say goodbye. Today he leaves for Lourenco Marques." He paused. "Am I excused, please?"

He received affirmatives and went out into the garden. Gwen watched him skip down the steps, heard his swift running on the path. She looked at her uncle, half-smiling but with widened eyes.

"He's even better than I imagined," she said. "No wonder you're proud of him!"

"I wish I could say I made him as he is, but I can't. The good behaviour comes from the Portuguese half of the family. His spirit he owes as much to Renaldo as to me. Whenever he comes back from

one of these visits, I always find myself out of touch with him, and by the time we're normal and friendly he's off again."

"You could stop the visits."

"School will automatically do that."

"Do you like being called Papa?"

"What can I do? It's customary here, and the word has authority."

"I only wondered how you felt about it. I think it sounds charming! I do hope your son will let me know him."

"He will, but don't rush him, and don't treat him as someone important. He already knows that through having the Duque as his godfather he's a cut above other boys."

"He certainly has an air, and he's growing handsome." She laughed suddenly. "Now that I know him I feel this tussle with the Duque will provide some private fun for us - so long as we succeed. I'm awfully impatient to start things happening!"

But during that week very little happened. Gwen became a little more intimate with the child and became aware that though he liked her, he regarded her only as an agreeable visitor from his father's country. He was politely interested in the snapshots of his English aunt and uncle, was slightly amused that they should bear the same name as himself, but things outside Cedrillo touched him only lightly.

That Saturday morning it was Gwen who drove Vasco to his grandparents' house for his weekly visit. She had dressed soberly, in a navy linen dress which had a round embroidered neck and a touch of embroidery on the pocket. Her golden look was muted, and if she had beauty it was of a cleanly unsubtle type.

At the big old house in its modest, shut-in garden, she allowed Vasco to take the lead. He went up into the porch, gravely pulled the bell-rope and waited a moment before opening the door. They entered a dim, richly-furnished hall, to be greeted by a breathless old woman in black dress and white apron, who beamed upon Vasco and loosed a flood of Portuguese.

"Jacomina," said Vasco with dignity, "I bring my English cousin to see the senhora." After which he also used Portuguese.

They were shown into a sitting-room of large dimensions and many cabinets crowded with priceless silver and china. Vasco explained some of the pieces.

"This is a Dresden candlestick - perfect in every way. But this clock is also Dresden, though it has been repaired at some time. That big vase was a wedding present to my grandmother from a friend, and that plaque was given to my grandfather when he was twenty-one; you will see it is the coat-of-arms which was given to the first Paiva in Mozambique."

"You're well up on the family history," commented Gwen. "Have you ever asked your father about his ancestors?"

"Oh, yes," answered the surprising child. "His father was a doctor and also his grandfather. Before then, the family were wool merchants."

The door opened a little wider and a woman swept slowly into the room. She was thin and erect, her black dress rustled, her eyes were small and dark and encircled by fine pleats of sallow-brown skin. Her face, thinned with age, had a delicate papery look, but her voice was strong and tender as she spoke to the child.

"Ah, querido, you come to see your old avo." She bent so that he could kiss her cheek, and looked at Gwen as she straightened. "And this is your English cousin, no?"

"Yes, this is Gwen," he said.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, senhorita. It is good for Vasco to meet some of his father's family. Will you not sit down?"

Gwen waited till Senhora Paiva was seated, and took a chair across the room from her. Vasco at once began to describe something to his grandmother, but the old lady raised a thin, tapering hand.

"We speak in English, my son. You know already that one uses the tongue of one's guest. For the present you will not speak at all."

Not a whit put out, Vasco seated himself on a stool and leant forward to trace the pattern on the Tabriz carpet. The senhora smiled faintly but graciously at Gwen.

"So you come to Cedrillo to visit your uncle, the doctor," she said. "It must be a great pleasure to him to see a member of his family after so long. You like Cedrillo?"

"Very much, senhora. I didn't think it possible that a part of Africa could be so Continental."

"But even after twenty years, your uncle remains very English, does he not?"

Not quite sure whether there were a hidden meaning here, Gwen nodded, and said, "I don't suppose one could ever really lose one's race and my uncle must have been terribly British both in ways and looks when he first came here."

The senhora said, "Vasco, go to Jacomina and choose your biscuits. You may come back when she brings the tray."

He wandered out, and the old lady sat back against the silk upholstery of her chair and fingered the triple row of pearls at her loose-skinned neck.

She said, "Vasco is a fine boy."

"Yes, and amazingly intelligent."

"He is our only grandson, so you will understand that we love him very much."

"Yes, of course, senhora."

"He is the light of our old age." The senhora waited to let this sink in before adding, more lightly, "You cannot wonder that we have great plans for him. He will be educated in Beira while he is young, and we will then send him to the fine old university of Coimbra in Portugal. After that, some travel before he takes his place here, as head of the Paiva plantations and mills. We shall not live to see all this, but his *padrinho*, the Duque de Condeiro, will guide him and also manage his affairs until he settles here."

"It sounds a bright future," said Gwen inadequately.

For a moment she was tempted to state her uncle's case, his right to have his son educated in England away from this rarefied atmosphere. But she looked into those keen old eyes, hesitated, and the moment passed.

But the senhora probed gently. "Did you come here only because it is good to keep contact with one's uncle?"

"No, there were other reasons. I'd never seen Vasco, of course."

"And now that you have seen him you realize that only in appearance is he a little like his father?"

"If he'd grown up in England the position would be reversed; he'd be Portuguese only slightly in his looks."

"Had his dear mother lived," stated the old lady, "there would not now come this question of where he should be educated. You understand?"

"Yes, I do," said Gwen sincerely. "But I'm sure you see my uncle's side of this matter. You have a daughter and granddaughter, but Uncle George has only Vasco, and if you have the child educated as you suggest, he'll grow away from his father."

"Nonsense! The doctor will be here, to watch. I see you do not comprehend our ways, senhorita. You must learn."

And that was that. For about three minutes they sat quite silent, the senhora like a beautiful image in her high-backed chair and Gwen very awkwardly, with her feet planted firmly in front of her as though she were ready for flight.

Then came sounds, and Vasco tapped and opened the door to allow Jacomina to bring in the tray of beverages. Gwen was given chocolate and offered a selection of homemade biscuits, the senhora took coffee and Vasco drank lemon syrup. They spoke stiltedly together, *and when* the glasses were empty Gwen knew it was time to leave. She stood up.

The senhora spoke first. "Vasco, my child, you may go to your grandfather's bedroom and wish him *adeus*. He was not well enough to get up today."

When Gwen was driving back towards the doctor's bungalow she felt a little better. The cloying sensation of that dim, rich dwelling was blowing away in the breeze, and she was able to glimpse the strength of the senhora's will and purpose. No wonder Uncle George felt smothered by these Paivas and the Duque. Compared with them he was poor and negligible, and in a way it was a pity he had the stubborn wish to send Vasco to England. The boy was happy here, where he had been born, and already he had a respect which amounted almost to reverence for the Paiva family history. Educated in the way they intended, he would make an excellent head of the family one day, thought Gwen.

When they reached the bungalow, Dr. Crosland had finished in the surgery and was washing his hands. He came through to the living-room, flexing his fingers, smiled at Gwen and began sorting through the mail which had just been brought by a black boy on a bicycle.

"How did you get on?" he asked. "Did you see the senhora?"

Gwen nodded. "We didn't speak together very much. She's old and beautiful, like that china she's collected."

"But she's not nearly so brittle. There's a ramrod where her spine should be."

Gwen smiled. "She told me her plans for Vasco's future."

Her uncle separated a couple of letters, flipped through the rest of the mail and then went back to look more closely at something. "They're good plans," he said with a sigh. "Sometimes I think it's pigheaded to want to send the boy away from them ..." He broke off. Then said, "Look here, a telegram for you. It could only have just come in or they wouldn't have shoved it in with the mail. It's from Eng- land."

Gwen took it quickly, ripped open the envelope and in a couple of seconds imagined every kind of catastrophe at Chesterham. She read the few words, let out a breath of relief... and then knew a sudden feeling of premonition.

"It's from Monica!" she exclaimed. "Listen to this: 'Arriving Beira by air on the tenth. Meet me.' That's all - just those words. I can't believe it!"

Her uncle rustled the letters thoughtfully. "It does seem strange. It doesn't take long from England by air, of course, but it's expensive. If she has that much money to spare, why should she come here?"

"I don't know." Gwen debated, and found the idea even more distasteful than it had been a minute ago. In order to have time to think, she said, "Monica has some money of her own, you know. Mother's sister left her quite a lot and some valuable pictures, which she sold. Father saw her through university, but she used her own money for dress, and so on." She paused. "Do you mind her coming, Uncle George?"

"Certainly not. The more Croslands here at the moment the better, but I'm afraid she'll have to share your room."

"That's all right." But Gwen's heart was sinking, very slowly, to the level it had reached when Monica had captured Howard Greer. Since coming to Mozambique her perspective had altered and she had had the conviction that she would go home feeling free and new. Now, though, she was not only to be reminded of past unhappiness, but even this experience, which she had gratefully regarded as something of her very own, must be shared and perhaps even ... appropriated.

"The cable says the tenth - that's Tuesday," she said. "Do you know anything at all about the planes?"



"No, but we can find out. Tuesday is my day for the hospital, but I'll find someone to take you to the airport and collect Monica." He gave a small, appreciative laugh. "This is really good. For two years I've been trying to get one of you out here, and now I shall have you both! Monica, if I remember, has sharp wits and a pretty face. If the three of us can't get the better of these in-laws of mine, we don't deserve to have Vasco's future in our hands!"

Gwen folded the telegram. By an outward stillness she was trying to achieve some steadiness within. Common sense came to her aid, and did its best to oust the unease from her mind. But she couldn't think of anything which might induce Monica to forsake her own light way of living and take a plane to Mozambique. When she herself had arranged her departure from England, Monica had been amused and sympathetic, as if the trip to Africa were a banishment from all that meant excitement.

"You poor old thing," she had said. "Why, oh, why haven't we a rich aunt in Nice or Cannes? Mozambique sounds like an inferno on the edge of the world. And what will you do in the heat!"

Gwen thought suddenly: That's right. Monica hates the heat. She won't stay. It's just that she's fed up with Howard and coming here is a little different from anything she's ever done before.

But those few words in the cable hung over her weekend. Inexorably, the hours passed and brought with them a sense of fatalism. And on Sunday night Colin Reed drifted in. .

"I'm here again," he said, accepting a cup of coffee. "Missed me?"

"As a matter of fact, I have," Gwen admitted as she dropped two dominoes of sugar into his cup. "We've had news. My sister's arriving at Beira on Tuesday."

"Coming out in droves, aren't you?" he commented with a grin. "Is she as fair as you are?"

"She's a redhead - one of those light red silky heads of hair, and blue eyes."

"Sounds a beauty. What in the world persuaded her to come here?"

"I've no idea. She's at a loose end, of course, and she always was a bit restless."

Colin said shrewdly, "Not looking forward to it, are you?"

Gwen cast a quick glance at her uncle. "Don't be silly," she answered. "I'm a bit puzzled, that's all."

"By the way, Colin," put in Uncle George, "would you like to hire or borrow a decent car and take Gwen to meet her *sister*? - *that is*, if you'll be free."

"Isn't my bus good enough for Sister Monica?"

"Let's start her off with a good impression. That man Lopes will lend you his car. Tell him to bill me for it."

Colin nodded. "All right, if you say so." He drank some coffee, gave Gwen a half-wink. "You don't seem to care what I've been doing with myself."

"Tell us."

"Remember I had to see the Duque? He sent me up- country to help rid a farm of leopard and lion. I've spent the whole week stalking and shooting. Still, the pay was good."

"And what do you do now?"

"He also gave me the name of a man in Quelimane who's keen on arranging a safari for several businessmen before the rains. In a few days I'll go down and see him. Tell you what, Gwennie - we'll go to Beira on Monday and have a night on the town. There's a marvellous hotel right on the sea-front where we can put up for the night, and we'll bring your sister back here on Tuesday."

"Yes, Gwen, why shouldn't you do that?" said Uncle George. "You didn't see much of Beira the day you arrived."

"I can afford it," she said, "but Colin should hang on to his money."

"Oh, come," Colin said easily, "you're only young once. I'll soon be too decrepit to enjoy a simple night out in a place like Beira. You must see a film there - a Hollywood product dubbed in Portuguese. They're particularly funny if you've already seen them in English. Mind if I telephone the hotel in Beira from here, Doc?"

"Go ahead and do it now. For the sake of propriety you'd better ask for rooms on different floors."

Colin laughed and slouched out into the hall. They heard him give the number and get through in about three minutes, the Anglicized Portuguese in which he made the reservations.

He came back into the room. "Well, there you are! You'll enjoy it, Gwen, and it'll put you in a carefree mood for meeting your sister."

He had a second cup of coffee and brandy with it, gave a few details of his trip up-country, and when eventually he went out to his wagon he took Gwen with him and showed her the skins he was hoping to sell.

"How would you like a leopard made into a stole?" he asked.

"Not a bit. Apart from the gaudy spots, it's too newly dead." She looked at his thin face in the darkness. "You didn't have such a good time, did you? I can't help feeling you're not a scrap cut out for game-hunting."

"You feel right," he said laconically, "but I'm in it and there's nothing else I can do."

"You must have been good at something when you were younger."

"No. I had a few hobbies - even painted a little - but I was good at nothing."

"You painted?" she caught him up. "Have you painted in Africa?"

"Occasionally. Interested in painting?"

"I'm interested in everything."

"In me?"

"Well, yes . . ."

"I knew you'd hesitate. Problem boy, that's me. Like to take on the unravelling?"

"I might - if I hadn't something else on my mind."

"Some other chap?"

"A young one - Vasco."

"Leave it, Gwennie," he advised, patting her shoulder. "With me, you'd get results of some sort. That youngster has all the devotion he needs. I haven't any."

"There's such a thing as being devoted to oneself!"

"Ouch," he said agreeably. "Maybe you're right, at that. I do find myself a little preoccupied with Colin Reed just lately, but I blame you for it. It wasn't till you came that I wondered how much longer I could go on squandering the years."

"That's not true. You'd already decided that you'd like to start a cabin resort on the coast!"

"Yes, but I intended' to take it easy and stay a bachelor. While I was up-country chasing lion I kept thinking that it was a hell of a way to live, so something must have got into me." He lifted a hand, philosophically. "I've always said that things work out if you leave them alone, so that's what I'd better do. Like a ride in the moonlight?"

"There isn't any moon!"

"There is, somewhere. We could travel till we find it."

"You're in an escapist mood. Where are you going to park tonight?"

"Usual place - unless you'll let me stay here."

"You hadn't better. Goodnight, Colin."

"I can take a hint - even a loaded one. See you Monday afternoon. We'll get away at about five. All right?"

"Absolutely. Goodnight again."

He answered her in a smiling drawl and got behind the wheel. The wagon rattled away and Gwen went indoors feeling brighter. As she undressed that night she found herself actually growing a little excited at the prospect of spending an evening in Beira and a night at

the magnificent new hotel which looked out over the Indian Ocean. And it would be nice to have Monica here - she hoped so, anyway.

By the time they arrived at Beira it was quite dark, but Colin knew the town, and he even had some acquaintance with the hotel, though he confessed only to having taken a drink in the lounge. He booked them in at the reception desk, and Gwen's overnight case was carried to the lift by an African porter. She was wafted aloft, shown into a room which was grandly furnished and left alone to wash in the splendid adjoining bathroom.

That evening was the happiest she had known for many months. Colin was in his best mood, informative in a slightly cynical fashion, exceptionally easy and carefree in his manner. They ate a superb dinner at the hotel, toured the town cafes, saw an atrocious film in which well-known faces mouthed alien words, came out and took a drive, and ended up dancing at the hotel.

When eventually they parted for their bedrooms both were sleepy. Gwen took a bath and sank into the luxury of her bed, and she slept with a warm flush on her cheeks and a smile on her lips. Dawn filtered through the Venetian blinds and made a lattice of light across the bed. She sat up, and because this was an exotic setting she slipped out of bed and did something she had never done before breakfast; she lit a cigarette.

The balcony overlooked the calmest blue sea she had ever seen. Below, the esplanade was empty in the early light, though a couple of boys were sweeping the driveway and another washed down a car. A tea tray was brought to the room and she took her cup to the balcony and stood there till there were other signs of life. A couple of men slipped down to the beach for a swim, someone drove away in a car stacked with luggage, then a whole family appeared on the beach and

ran into the waves. She would have liked a swim herself, but had not brought a suit. So a cold shower had to suffice, and after it she put on the dress she had brought - a sleeveless gold and white with a white suede belt. She brushed her hair till it shone, made up carefully and at eight-fifteen went down to breakfast.

She went to the table she had shared with Colin last night, guessed that he had had drinks in his bedroom and was sleeping them off. But it was pleasant in this immense room full of white tables with flowers set here and there and an assiduous waiter at the elbow. She ordered fruit, eggs and toast with coffee, surveyed the room once more ... and received a shock. A dozen yards away, staring at her, sat the Duque de Condeiro.

Though there were a couple of tables between them there was no mistaking the fire in his glance. He rose and bowed without smiling, seemed to hesitate before re-seating himself. All Gwen was able to take in was the sharply critical expression and the fact that he was alone, but his very presence was like a wall of tangible displeasure. She was served with dishes of fruit and eggs and she helped herself from them, but her movements were stiff and restricted. It was odd what a blight the man could be.

She became aware that he was standing and greeting two dark women, one young and other middle-aged. A kissed wrist for the older woman, a charming bow for the younger, before he saw them seated at his table. The potential fiancée and her mother, no doubt. Instead of taking them direct from Lourenco Marques to Cedrillo he had made a tour of it and given them a day or two at Beira. Good heavens, Gwen thought crossly, as if it matters to me what he's doing ... or how his expression changes for that young woman!

It was with relief that she saw Colin strolling down the aisle between two rows of tables. He looked a clean-cut rake, if there were such a thing, and the very sight of his English face gone slightly to seed was

a tonic. She smiled at him as he lowered himself on the opposite side of the table.

"You're so bright and fresh you hurt," he said equably. "Sorry I didn't get down sooner, but I never face anyone till I've been up an hour." He ordered eggs and bacon and black coffee, shook out his napkin. "Do you wish you were staying on here for a few days? It would knock an irreparable hole in one's pocket, but there's something decidedly more-ish about luxury hotels. I spend a night in one about once in every five years, just to keep my hand in."

She laughed, bent slightly over the piece of toast she was buttering and said quietly, "Don't look now, but the Grand Duke is over to your left. He has two women with him, one of them young and beautiful."

"That would be Julieta Vidago. She's one of these patrician types."

"I noticed it. What's her position at Cedrillo?"

"She and her mother are guests of Renaldo. They're living in a house he owns, and I suppose they'll go back to Portugal with him. They came together."

"From Portugal? Why would he bring her here?"

He lifted his shoulders carelessly. "Why not, if he intends to marry the woman? After all, he always spends five or six months of the year here, and his wife would have to do the same. Maybe he wants to make sure she can stand the climate and fit in locally before he pops the question."

"Do you believe he'd do that - not marry a certain woman simple because she didn't fit in with the kind of life he likes?"

He patted her hand on the table. "There's no knowing, honey, but I wouldn't mind betting that when Renaldo falls in love, he'll do it



wisely, with a woman who's acceptable in all circles. His sort doesn't fall headlong."

He began to eat, and while Gwen drank more coffee she determinedly took an interest in his intermittent comments and the palms which waved green banners beyond the deep windows. But she knew when the Duque and his women left the dining-room; the whole place went figuratively on one knee.

It seemed that he had met the women here only for coffee; Continental types, presumably, who seldom took breakfast in public or otherwise. Somehow, Gwen felt a little on edge and impatient with Colin for taking his time.

In the lounge, they decided to check out early. Gwen went to her room, packed her few things and told the bedroom boy to have her case sent down to the lobby. She came down and paid her bill, drifted out to the front of the hotel and stood under the massive portico entrance, looking across the esplanade at the pale beach which glared emptily in the hot sunshine. Colin joined her, shoved his hands into his pockets and stood in that loose-limbed way of his, regarding the few cars which rounded the corner and cruised along the esplanade.

"This is one of those places where you enjoy the beach only in winter," he remarked. "I'll get the cases on board and we'll drive out towards the golf course; it's on the way to the airport."

"Do you think the plane will be on time?"

"They mostly are. It won't be later than eleven-thirty, anyway." He was turning to re-enter the hotel, but stopped and murmured, "Oh, oh."

Intuitively, Gwen knew. She put on a smile and turned it towards the approaching Renaldo. He was alone, tall and commanding in a very

light suit of immaculate cut. He was tightly smiling, but little dagger blades shone in the dark grey eyes.

"So I find you," he said, without a word of greeting to Colin. "This is most unusual, no?"

Gwen was purposely obtuse. "Yes, and I'm enjoying it immensely. I always thought of Beira as a mosquito- infested place with only a handful of houses and a grubby wharf. This is a revelation."

"To me, also," he said crisply. Then, to Colin: "You cannot thoroughly have cleared that farm of pests in this short time. The manager himself has told me it would take a month."

Colin shrugged. "I happened to have two very good boys with me. The manager was satisfied."

"If the work is finished, why are you not in Quelimane, arranging for the hunt?"

"One has to relax sometimes, senhor. I shall probably go to Quelimane tomorrow."

The Duque looked sharply at Gwen. "Why are you here, senhorita?"

"My sister arrives by air today. We're meeting her."

"So? It was not necessary to leave Cedrillo at dawn in order to meet the plane at midday."

Gwen shot a glance at Colin, said evenly, "We came yesterday, senhor. We had fun in town last night."

"You came yesterday - alone?" he demanded.

Gwen tightened against him. "Alone," she said firmly. "We're English, you know, and not bound by your conventions. I don't know enough about Mozambique to drive here myself, and Colin conveniently turned up, so we used him. My uncle agreed to the trip."

"Your uncle should have known better! And Reed, too!" He flashed the small blades of light at Colin. "Miss Crosland is not one of your tourist women. For the present she is resident in Cedrillo, and must accept the customs of the country. You knew that, and ignored it."

"It was up to the doctor, surely?"

"The doctor has never lived by any laws but his own. He trusts his niece, and for some reason he trusts you also; for him, that is enough. But for me - I would not trust you very far, my friend. You two are leaving now?"

"Yes, senhor."

"Then please get your car while I speak with Miss Crosland."

Colin lifted an eyebrow at Gwen to convey his helplessness, and went inside the hotel to arrange for the stowing of the two bags. Gwen, her nerves bewilderingly raw, stared up at the taut features of Renaldo.

"Really, senhor ..."

"You will listen to me," he said rapidly. "This ... this escapade of yours is indiscreet and unforgivable. In your country this slackness between men and women may be permissible, but here it is not even contemplated. Naturally, you needed an escort to the coast to meet your sister, but it could have been arranged with discretion. You could have appealed to Senhor Freitas or even to the old Senhora Paiva, and it would have been managed. I am very angry about this!"

"But it's no concern of yours," she returned quickly. "I wouldn't have thought of asking a stranger while Colin was available. We English people understand each other's ways, and a day's jaunt to Beira doesn't mean a thing to either of us, apart from the enjoyment. I was only too glad to have Colin's company and protection."

"Protection ... from such as Reed!" His scorn was vitriolic. "Next, he would beg you to go with him to Quelimane. In any case, it is not permissible that you travel alone and stay in a hotel without a chaperon. I will speak to the doctor about it!"

"Oh, please. How can anything I do possibly affect anyone else in Cedrillo? I can't suddenly become a mouse who walks around in the shadow of a duenna! I'm sorry," she added suddenly, remembering the girl at the breakfast table. "I didn't mean to be rude, but you must see that your customs can't possibly be mine. I could no more become Portuguese than you could become English."

"That is so," he clipped out, "but you will still guard your behaviour while you are with us. I do not know when I have been so furious as I was this morning when I saw you joined by Reed in the dining-room. It was disgraceful enough that you should be alone there, but Reed ... that homeless gambler! It was monstrous."

The hot colour had receded a little from her cheeks, leaving them a soft gold; her eyes were nearly as brilliant as his. "There was nothing dreadful about it; you're merely making it seem so. And I know why!"

"Yes?" on a steely, insistent note.

"Yes," she said flatly. "You think my having a bit of fun is something you can use against my uncle; that's why you're making so much of it. You can see it as an incident you can cite next time he mentions his wish to send Vasco to England."

"That had not occurred to me, senhorita!" He paused, and added coolly, "On this matter I think we now comprehend each other. You will commit no more follies, and if at any time you need help of any kind - *any* kind, Miss Crosland - you will send a message to the Quinta. If I am not there my secretary-will deal with it. Understood?"

She nodded, because it was no use arguing. She turned her head and looked at the sea, wished Colin would hurry with the car. This man at her side made her too conscious of the tremendous distance between them, and it was a sensation she hadn't known before, with anyone.

Renaldo said quietly, "You remember the gold roses, Miss Crosland? Beautiful, but with a large thorn to each stem. In appearance you have the warmth of those roses; the thorns, I believe, you display only when you speak with me."

"Of course I'm vexed," she said. "I'd be annoyed with anyone who suggested my behaviour is immodest."

"Not immodest," he said at once. "It is indiscreet and careless. You are too young and far too innocent to have a close friendship with a waster like Reed." Very slightly, his voice lost its tone of command. "This sister of yours - did. you invite her to Cedrillo?"

"No, she decided to come."

"You will all three return to the bungalow immediately she arrives?"

"That's our intention."

"Very well. I myself am returning to Cedrillo this morning. I will pay my respects to the doctor this evening."

His eyes, when hers met them, had lost all the usual charm and suggestion of humour; they seemed hard and tyrannical. She was

glad to see the shining old car with Colin at the wheel slide round to the front of the hotel.

The Duque came down the steps at her side, opened the car door. His heels clicked as he bowed, and his look at Colin was narrow and calculating.

But all he said was, "I trust you will find your sister very well, Miss Crosland. *Ate a vista.*"

A porter muttered "*Obrigado*," as Colin tossed him a coin, the old gears slipped into place and the car moved away. They were a hundred yards from the hotel when Colin let out a breath, and grinned at her.

"I have the darnedest luck," he said. "First night under a roof in a year and I have to run into him. Did he tell you I'm a bad lad?"

"He makes me tired," she said. "Let's talk about something pleasant."

They did. Then Colin stopped at the Pavilhao above the beach and made her drink wine she did not want with a plateful of shrimps which might have been tasty had she been hungry. They ran alongside the golf course and reached the small airport at eleven-fifteen. At eleven-twenty-five the plane came in.

Gwen's hands were hot and clammy as she watched the half-dozen passengers descend the steps. Monica came out just before the last passenger, who was a man; she flung a bright smile over her shoulder and Gwen knew a little sickeningly, that even during the brief flight from Central Africa on a local airline Monica had been dispensing her own infallible brand of allure. Reluctantly, the man handed over a smart little hand-case and bowed. Monica ravished him once more with a smile and then she came towards the building.

She was tall and stylishly slim, and she wore a blue-grey suit with a small white hat on her red hair. She waved, and Gwen waved back.

"My sister," she said to Colin.

"Wow!" was his soft but graphic reply.

## CHAPTER FOUR

MONICA was amazingly pleasant, even to Colin Reed. Obviously, after one comprehensive glance at him she had decided he was negligible, but then she had often used negligible people to get what she wanted, and the man did have looks, of a sort. She spoke kindly to him, either did not see or ignored that slightly knowing smile of his, and told Gwen it was lovely to be here!

"Of course, the journey by air is awfully quick," she said as they began moving after her baggage had been loaded into the car, "but after the large plane the small one was boring, and this morning's hop seemed the longest. But, darling, what heat! I never imagined it could be as hot anywhere as it is here."

"You soon get used to it," commented Gwen. "After a day or two it doesn't bother you."

"It'll bother me." The two girls were sitting in the back seat and Monica nodded forward at Colin's head. "You haven't written us about this Englishman of yours."

Colin's shoulders lifted. "I'm just a hanger-on. Little occupation and no fixed abode."

"Don't believe him," said Gwen. "He's a big-game hunter."

"Good lord." Monica leant further forward. "I always thought such men had an atmosphere about them."

"This is a pleasure trip, so I left mine in Cedrillo," said Colin. "I'll wear it tomorrow and let you take a snapshot of me for your album."

"So you're a smarty," Monica commented. "Ever shot an elephant?"



"No, but I've helped to corner them, so that some other guy could claim the shot. Your sister was being kind when she called me a big-game hunter. I'm only a guide and organizer."

"Sounds a poor way of making a living."

"Oh, it is. But I'm free."

"I believe in freedom, too," she said, "but freedom is not much good unless you have the means to enjoy it. Do you have to live in this hot country?"

"I happen to like it. I've bet your sister that you won't stay longer than a week."

"Then Gwen's in the money," Monica told him gaily. "I intend to stay for a long, long time!"

A small, cold hand seemed to squeeze Gwen's heart. She sat back in her corner and watched Monica talking forward to Colin. The light red hair had the usual soft, well-cared-for look and the blue eyes were bright. Monica hadn't changed; lovely, intelligent, exciting, for ever acting whatever role she felt might be expected of her. Now she was the sparkling young woman eager for adventure and ready to be contemptuous of a man who took life easily.

Why had she come? Gwen asked herself once more. There was nothing in Cedrillo for a girl whose chief aim was to impress the men she met. Quite certainly she had little interest in the countryside, for when coconut palms and other exotic trees and plants were pointed out to her she looked vague and said, "Oh, really?" while thinking her own thoughts.

Colin's presence maintained the restraint between the sisters, so that conversation remained superficial for the whole journey. Monica

looked out to the sleepy town of Cedrillo but was not, apparently, dismayed. But she did lift an eyebrow at the small bungalow inhabited by Dr. Crosland and his son, and remarked that she had hoped for something more impressive.

"Here we are," Colin said. "I won't butt into the family reunion any longer. See you tomorrow, Gwen."

"I thought you were going to Quelimane."

"I'll call as I set out. You might send out Sezuko to help unload."

"I will, and thanks for everything, Colin."

"You're welcome, honey. Tell your uncle I'll return the car to old Lopes. So long, Monica - see you tomorrow if you haven't melted away."

Monica merely flipped a cool finger at him and followed Gwen into the house. She looked about her in the sitting-room, picked up a china ashbowl and put it down again, stared at the houseboy as he staggered through the hall with one of her cases.

"What a place! Where is our respected uncle?"

Gwen told herself she mustn't mind these tones from Monica; they were part of another act. "He spends Tuesdays at the mission and gets home at about five. He picks up Vasco at the aunt's house on his way. When the car is here I collect the child myself."

"You seem to have worked yourself in. Isn't it deadly while you're alone?"

"No, everything's much too strange. You should see the things that grow in the garden!"

"I'll take your word for them." Monica ran a finger over the record player, opened a door of the cabinet and closed it again. Her tones were guarded as she asked, "Were you surprised to hear I was coming to Mozambique?"

"Completely amazed. But I hope you're going to enjoy it."

"Is that the truth - or are you being the affectionate and forgiving sister?" Monica didn't wait for an answer before adding, "I don't blame you if you didn't want me here, but you should really be grateful to me for showing you how changeable a man can be. In any case, it wasn't my fault that Howard dropped you flat when I came home."

"It's not worth talking about. How are Mother and Father?"

"You asked that at the airport. They're just the same."

"Did they mind your coming here?"

"Father did, though Sister Bertram can easily manage the work. But Mother was all for it. We talked it over and over and she did the persuading. But Father wouldn't pay for more than the sea fare, so I had to dig into my own cash. Still, every venture is worth a little speculation." A brief silence. "Have you got over Howard?"

"Yes. How long did he last with you?"

Monica took off the little hat and with a studied gesture slicked back her hair. She had the white skin that goes with red hair, a glow of colour over each cheekbone.

"I found he clung," she said. "These musical, superior men are always too conscious of their emotions. You were really much more his dish than I could ever be, and he admitted it, only last week."

You'll probably be able to pick up where you left off with him when you get home - that is, if no other man shows up."

"Would you like to wash?" asked Gwen, trying not to sound offhand. "I'm afraid there are only three bedrooms, so you'll have to share mine."

"That's a blow." Then Monica shrugged and smiled. "Well, we've shared before, if not for a good many years. Lead the way, infant."

Monica washed, and when she came into the bedroom and stood near the mirror to make up her face, Gwen saw for a moment the likeness between the two of them. Monica's features were longer and almost classical in cast, but the eyes were as wide-set, the hair-line as soft in each of them. It was just that a regularity of feature in Monica created beauty, whereas Gwen's short nose was ordinary, her mouth merely pretty. The two years or so between them was not enough to account for Monica's sophistication; Monica was the daughter of her well-dressed, shrewd and slightly helpless mother, but it was their father, absorbed in his home and profession, whom Gwen resembled.

Between them, they unpacked Monica's two large suitcases. Gwen hung away silks and cottons, an original model evening gown in ice-blue, another in lilac silk and black lace, a mink stole, two more lovely trouser suits.

"You've been splashing out," she commented.

"It'll be worth" it. This is something I've always wanted to do - in fact, it couldn't have turned out better if I'd actually planned every detail." Monica tossed gossamer underwear into a drawer, opened another drawer and sighed to find it filled with Gwen's things. "I'll have to have more space for my oddments, darling. Can't you empty this for me?"

"I didn't think you'd bring so much, but I'll see if I can borrow a chest from Uncle George's bedroom. He has two." Gwen straightened, watched her sister light a cigarette and expertly flick the match through the open window into the garden. "I'm not sure that you'll have much use for those marvellous evening dresses here."

"I'll wear them," Monica said confidently. She blew smoke and gave her sister a long, oblique glance. "Tell me about the people here - the Portuguese."

"They're friendly, in a stiff fashion. I've only met them through Vasco. He's a fine boy."

"I'd almost forgotten he's your reason for coming here. Your letter said you anticipated difficulty with ... what is his name ... the Duke of something?"

Her voice was too casual; a dryness attacked Gwen's throat. "The Duque de Condeiro. He's Vasco's godfather."

"Yes, you wrote that in your letter. You wrote very fully, as a matter of fact. I suppose it was natural that you'd notice so much about one of the nobility. Have you been to his mansion again?"

"No. He was just being kind that first time, I think. And of course he likes Uncle George to visit him sometimes."

"Is he really as rich and handsome as you said in your letter?"

"Every bit."

"Does he come here?"

For some reason, Gwen had to sidetrack this for a moment. "He's very interested in Vasco. You must put in a word for Uncle George's viewpoint."

"We'll have to see about that," Monica returned lightly. "I'm not going to jeopardize my own chances for Uncle George or anyone else."

"What do you mean - your own chances?"

Monica considered her for a few seconds, and then rubbed out her cigarette on the ashtray which stood on the bedside table. She kicked off her shoes, stretched one foot and admired the arch of the ankle.

"You don't really know me so well as you think you do, Gwen? What sort of man do you suppose I'd marry?"

"You'll marry someone who's a success."

"You're partly on the track, but you don't go far enough. Do you remember when Aunt Lila died and I came in for some of her money? I was twenty and ambitious - but not for the usual sort of career. I didn't get Father to send me to university because I wanted to be educated or to meet penniless male students. I simply wanted the cachet that a spell at university gives a woman - that's why I didn't bother to learn. I could have got a degree easily enough if I'd tried for it; when I set myself to it I can do anything."

"That's true."

Monica laughed gently. "Oh, come, Gwen. It didn't take much to snaffle Howard from you. You mustn't go on holding that against me."

"I don't. It's practically forgotten." Gwen paused, trying to keep anxiety from her voice. "You've come here with a plan, haven't you?"

"Not a plan - I'm willing to stretch a bit here and there." She sat suddenly on the stool in front of the dressing chest, stretched both arms in an oddly sensuous gesture. "I feel so good! It's too hot here,

but I know it's going to be lucky for me. I feel it in my bones! Gwen, I'm longing to meet this man."

"The ... Duque?"

"Of course! Don't stare at me like that or I shall think you've gone overboard for the man yourself." She studied her reflection again in the mirror, did it provocatively, over her shoulder. "I'm as good-looking as anything he'll find here or in Portugal, and I have the added attraction of being different. Some girls hate being red-haired, but I love it. Where men are concerned it always gets me what I want!"

"You ... you're mad," said Gwen, as steadily as she was able. "Renaldo de Condeiro is interested in a Portuguese girl. He wouldn't look at an English woman."

"No? He'll look at this one, and keep on looking - for so long that he'll forget his other conquests. Darling, you always were a baby about men, and you're entirely without ambition. I've never talked to you like this before because I knew you wouldn't approve, but now you have to know, and you must help, where you can. I'd never put this into words before I told Mother what I was hoping for."

"What *are* you hoping for?"

"It's more than a hope; it's what you might term a purpose in my young life. Bluntly, I mean to marry someone like the Duque de Condeiro. I've always meant to - ever since Aunt Lila used to tell me when I was small that I was cut out for big things. Much uglier and less intelligent women than I have married into great families. I can do it."

By now Gwen was feeling physically sick and quite unable to carry on the discussion. She said baldly, "You'd better take the bed near the window. I'll go and get some tea."

"Gwen, don't be so stuffy." Monica was suppliant now, looking round from the mirror with her injured expression. "My idea may sound cold-blooded, but it isn't. After all, these people are accustomed to marrying for convenience and yet I daresay their marriages are successful. Mine would be, I know. One's reasons for marrying are often more important than the man himself."

"Mother agreed to this?" asked Gwen.

"I came with her blessing. She took it half as a joke but said if I couldn't do it, no one could."

"I can't believe it."

"It's true. She'd adore being mother-in-law to a Portuguese duke. Even you must admit that."

"But to think she'd agree to your coming here to make up to a man you haven't even seen ..."

Monica stood up, thrusting the stool hard against the dressing table with her knees. "I knew you'd be feeble about this, but I won't have you ruin everything for me. From the sound of this Duque he wouldn't be hard to fall in love with, and all I'm asking of you is an acquiescent, sisterly attitude. And you have to keep quiet about it, of course. It wouldn't do for anyone else to know why I'm here."

"Then you'll have to think up a reason for coming, won't you?" said Gwen wearily. "I don't suppose it will tax you."

"Are you going to be sensible?"



"I promise nothing - except that nothing you've said today will go any further."

"That's fair enough." Monica was smiling again. "How soon shall I be able to meet the handsome senhor?"

"He's calling here tonight."

"Really?" Monica's blue eyes were sapphires, her teeth flashed, small and pearly. "That's far better than I dared hope for. Perk up, darling. Just imagine. The day may come when you'll be able to refer to your brother-in-law, the Duque de Condeiro. So long as he's mine, I'll even let you say you knew him first!"

Perhaps it was fortunate for Gwen's milling brain that her uncle turned up just then and Vasco jumped out of the car. She fetched a cup for her uncle and a glass of orange juice for the boy, and as Monica came into the room she made the introduction. Uncle George, good simple man that he was, did not question why Monica had come; he rubbed his hands happily and remarked that it felt good to have a family about him, and Vasco stared for a moment at the bright hair and fair complexion and then made his usual polite greeting.

Then he turned to Gwen. "What do you think - I've been given two guinea-pigs! Papa says they must have a hutch like the rabbits in story books, so I must get Sezuko to make one."

Thankfully, Gwen entered his mood. "Guinea-pigs! Where are they?"

"In a box at Tia Juana's. Will you help me to make their home?"

"Of course. Let's go and choose the site while Papa and Monica become acquainted."

Out in the garden Vasco was both grave and eager. He found a suitable spot near the back of the house and insisted on planting twigs where the run would be. This kept them both busy till darkness fell at its usually early hour, when Gwen raced him to the house. He washed and ate his supper of grilled fish and peach melba, while Gwen sat in the nook with him and talked a little, to shut out the voices of her uncle and Monica, who were in the sitting-room. Even so, she could not miss the interest in the doctor's voice; in his fashion he was as charmed with his niece as a younger, unrelated man might have been.

After his supper, Vasco made a rather lopsided drawing of the hutch he wanted and took it to the kitchen, where he instructed Sezuko. Exactly at seven, he said goodnight to his father and two cousins and went off to bed. Monica drifted along to the bedroom and half an hour later reappeared wearing a white dress with a simple turquoise necklace; a sculptured beauty seemed to have been built into her bones. Gwen wore a plain green and white cotton which was somehow typical of her natural caution and shyness.

The three dined together, coffee was brought into the sitting-room and the nook curtains drawn while Sezuko cleared. As he finished his coffee, Uncle George said, as usual,

"Well, I've things to write up." Then he paused. "Gwen, I forgot to tell you that Renaldo de Condeiro looked in here just after lunch. Seems he was annoyed that you and Colin Reed spent last night in Beira; I should have known better than to permit it and all that. I started to point out that you and Colin were of a different race and had a different set of values, but he cut me short. Said you're not to do such a thing again."

"I heard it all from him this morning. For Vasco's sake we'll have to obey the tyrant, I suppose."

Monica gave her uncle a bright, little-girl smile. "Gwen said the great man promised to call this evening, but if he came at lunch-time ..." she tailed off expectantly.

"Oh, he'll come," her uncle assured her. "The Duque always takes on that sort of duty. He welcomed Gwen, so he'll welcome you."

When he had gone to the surgery, Monica leaned forward to tap cigarette ash into a saucer. "You didn't tell me that Renaldo de Condeiro came here to welcome you."

"When you've met him," said Gwen coolly, "you'll realize that that kind of courtesy doesn't mean a thing to him. It's as well not to let it mean anything to you, either."

Monica leaned back in her corner of the chesterfield, and smiled. "You know, Gwen, it might be to your advantage to be on my side. And it would certainly do you good to get a grown-up slant on love and marriage. Honestly, I think you should make up your mind to marry someone out of the rut as well. I'll marry first, of course, and I'll do my best for you — put you in touch with suitable men. I couldn't bear to be married into a good family and have a sister engaged to a half-baked musician or a glorified tramp like Colin Reed."

"I wouldn't count too much on Renaldo, if I were you. He told me himself that it would never occur to him to marry an Englishwoman."

"Leave that side of things to me, my pet. Don't you think you'd better take the tray - it looks a bit messy."

Gwen stood up and put the cups together. "Tomorrow," she said, "you can learn the geography of the house and do a few chores yourself."

"God forbid. I'm staying on this side of the house!" Monica extended her limbs like an engaging kitten. "Now that it's cooler I think I'll repair my makeup. I'm afraid continuous heat must spoil the complexion."

"You can't have everything," Gwen observed, as she carried the tray from the room.

She washed up, hung the tea towels over the rail, rinsed the washing-up smell from her hands and dried them. But she lingered there, wishing she could go straight to bed. It wasn't cowardice, she told herself. Then what? An anxiety, a foreboding, a jealousy of Monica?

She shook her head quickly. Jealousy was primitive and it couldn't possibly enter into her relationship with Monica. In a way there were still fond of each other ...

With her hand on the door she paused and listened. The hard click of a car door, footsteps in the porch. She passed quickly into the corridor and walked along to the hall. He came straight in, half-smiling in his debonair fashion, his head inclined, a bouquet negligently hanging from his left hand.

"Good evening, senhorita. I am happy to see you again in the house of your uncle!"

She led the way into the sitting-room, saw Monica come gracefully to her feet and the startled lift of Renaldo's dark brows.

"The Senhor Duque," she said. "My sister ... Monica."

Monica's hand was taken and bowed over without quite receiving his lips. "But this is charming," Renaldo said with a delighted smile.<sup>1</sup> "Two sisters of such beauty under the small roof of the doctor! Allow me!"

There were two bouquets, it seemed - one of pink and white orchids which he presented to Monica, and another which he placed, with a glance of faint mockery, in Gwen's hands. She looked down, at the golden rosebuds, murmured something about putting the flowers in water till they could be arranged tomorrow morning. But he took them from her and placed them on the table with the orchids.

"They were cut with the evening dew oft them - there is no hurry." He turned to Monica. "It is not easy to grow roses here in Cedrillo - but I have perfected a few strains which at least have a truce with the climate. You have a favourite flower, senhorita?"

"Surprisingly," she said with a soft, innocent glance up at him, "I prefer the orchid. It's true, isn't it, Gwen?"

It was true enough; champagne, orchids and ermine. Gwen nodded. "Quite true. May I get you a drink, senhor?"

"Thank you, no." He indicated a chair, and when she was seated he sank down in one which was only a yard from Monica. He leaned towards her, a bright masculine interest in his glance. "You had a good journey, senhorita?"

"Very good - and unbelievable. I've never before travelled south of the Mediterranean."

In light, tantalizing tones, he asked, "And why do you come here to Cedrillo? Perhaps you, too, are anxious that the little Vasco should grow up an Englishman?"

"Why, no," softly. "I came because I thought it would be pleasant to see my uncle after so long, and to be with Gwen. I haven't thought much about Vasco. He seems such a happy little boy that I shouldn't think it would occur to anyone to alter the way he lives."

This was treachery, but Gwen made no sign that it mattered, except that she could not prevent her hand tightening on the arm of her chair; and Renaldo saw that, of course. He nodded comprehendingly at Monica.

"That also is my opinion, but your sister is a staunch supporter of her uncle. However, some time we may find that we all agree with each other."

Monica gave her prettiest laugh. "Gwen's a baby and very stubborn. She also wastes herself on lost causes - but she's a darling."

"How delightful," said Renaldo, "to hear a woman say such things of a sister. I am inclined to agree with you that she is young and stubborn. Which reminds me, senhorita," he turned to Gwen, "that perhaps I was a little harsh with you in Beira this morning. I was merely concerned for you."

"There was no need for concern, but thank you."

"You are very quiet this evening. The night away from home was tiring, yes?"

"No, it was exhilarating."

"But leaves a hangover," put in Monica. "Colin Reed is a wearing sort of man."

"Of course you have met him today," said Renaldo. "You will therefore agree with me that he is not a correct companion for your sister?"

"I was a little worried," Monica confessed with a tiny frown, "but Gwen's not flighty and on the whole Colin seems to be harmless. But I certainly agree with you and my uncle that it wouldn't do for them

to repeat the trip to Beira. There must be more conventional ways of forgetting one's heartaches."

Gwen looked quickly at her sister, then her glance collided with Renaldo's. For a moment it seemed that he would make some devastating pronouncement... and then it was past. He slipped a platinum cigarette case from his pocket and flipped it open, offering it first to Monica and then to Gwen. He used a platinum lighter on the three cigarettes and then sat back.

"I had some luck in Lourenco Marques," he said. "There was a company of entertainers who have an excellent puppet show, and I have engaged these' people to give a performance at the Quinta tomorrow. You two senhoritas like such entertainments?"

"Yes, indeed," from Monica. "How very kind of you, senhor."

Renaldo stood up. "You look as fresh as morning," he said, "but I know that a long plane journey can be wearisome. I will say goodnight and look forward to seeing you tomorrow."

She gave him her hand with piquant graciousness, remained seated. "Yes, I am a little tired, but arriving here has been such a wonderful experience. Thank you so much for your generous welcome. Goodnight, senhor."

Without looking at either of them, Gwen preceded Renaldo into the hall and stood aside so that he could pass her in the doorway. He paused and looked down at her.

"It would be as well if you, also, confessed to tiredness," he stated quietly. "I have not seen you so pale."

She said firmly, and as quietly, "One isn't always in top form, senhor. It was good of you to call on my sister's first evening."

"What are these heartaches of yours that she mentioned? It is the man in England?"

"I suppose that's whom she meant - yes."

He said, mocking and narrow-eyed, "You still find it difficult to forget this first love? It is like a sickness, is it not? You think you have recovered and then a night comes when the temperature rises and there is pain. You try to translate the sensation into a feeling for a man like Reed, but it is not very successful. Your sister is right — you are still a child!"

"Monica is only two years older."

"She is ten years older, and wiser. It is a miracle that she could have assimilated so much without becoming spoiled. You are young and seeking. Be guided a little by her."

"You mean," she asked hardily, "in the matter of Vasco?"

He stiffened perceptibly. "I did not mean that! I am capable of dealing with the matter of Vasco without help from anyone."

"You never give in, do you, senhor?"

He considered this. "I would be willing to give in if it were for the child's good and there were no one to hurt. I cannot accept that the doctor feels now as Vasco's grandparents would feel if he were taken from them."

"But that isn't the point..."

"I know the facts and I regard them without sentiment. Let us forget for a while this reason that you come to Cedrillo."



"It is not good to become tense about your problems - nor will remembering help you to recover from this childish love of yours." He looked at her small face, at the wheat- gold hair lit by the porch lamp. "I will make a little bargain with you. We will not talk about Vasco for one week. You will come often to the Quinta - with your sister, of course - and I will invite some young Portuguese people to meet you. You will enjoy parties without thought of why you are here in Mozambique. And then, just a week from today, we shall have a talk about Vasco, and I will let you state your case as you see it then."

"The way you put it, it sounds very fair, but I wonder if it is? You want me to keep an open mind but change as much as I can. You've certainly no intention of changing your own mind."

He gave a deep shrug, said charmingly, "Who knows? Till now, you have been very much the enemy. If you are friendly it may be impossible to resist you, even for the Paiva grandparents."

"I'm not deceived, senhor!"

"No? That will make it all the more interesting. And, senhorita," his tones were foreign, "it is a good policy to stop and look deeply into one's surroundings, to plant a simple happiness in the soil of the old heartache. It is never wise to seek a quick substitute for what one feels one has lost. *Compreende?*"

"Perfectly."

"Good. You may be foolish in some things, but I am sure you are wise in others. You will remember that I shall arrange to collect the child from his lessons tomorrow? I will send for you and your sister at four o'clock."

"Very well, senhor."

"And now you go to bed, *aureasinha*. *Boas noites!*"

She responded rather faintly, took her time about closing the door. She heard the white sports car shoot round the drive, and made the effort to walk back into the sitting- room.

Monica was standing just inside the room, her eyes hard, her mouth a thin red line. "I heard what you were saying," she said evenly. "A good deal of it, anyway. You've been using Vasco as a sort of bond between you."

"Well, it seems the bond is broken for a week."

"You can thank my arrival for that. He wants to be friends with us — with me, and your continual harping on Vasco would only be a nuisance." With what appeared an effort, she softened her voice. "You'll have to see this my way, Gwen. He hasn't asked you before to go often to his house, has he?"

"No."

"And now we're both invited - on my very first day. It's obvious, isn't it, darling? He's being condescending towards you so that you'll go there with me; he couldn't invite me alone."

"Could be that he doesn't want to. I've told you before there's a Portuguese girl."

Monica gestured with her hands, impatiently. "I don't compete with other women - I don't have to. All I wanted to point out was that it wouldn't do to get above yourself. He's careful and penetrating. I only met him this evening, but I'm certain there's a second meaning to almost anything he says."

Gwen conceded that. "Whatever game you mean to go in for, you'll have to play it his way. Monica ... if you were in love with him the whole thing would have a different atmosphere."

"But he does make me feel strange. He's such an intriguing and handsome specimen, and you do feel you're the only woman in the world when he looks at you."

"I don't."

"Don't be exasperating. A girl who could fall for Howard Greer couldn't possibly feel the magnetism of a man like Renaldo de Condeiro. I think he's unique. Falling in love With him is going to be the experience of a lifetime!"

"It certainly can't happen to order."

"But don't you see, Gwen," the blue eyes were brilliant in the lamplight, "this is why I came! The moment I read your letter I felt drawn here to Cedrillo. There was a sort of compulsion that I couldn't either define or repel, and now I realize that there's no one in the world I'd rather marry. Gwen, I'm so excited!"

Was she acting again? Gwen couldn't tell. She turned towards the door. "I'm going to get some ice for a nightcap for Uncle George. Then I'm going to bed. If you want the bathroom first you'd better go now."

Monica spent nearly an hour in the bathroom, and during that time Gwen chatted companionably with her uncle. He thanked her for cleaning up the dispensary and relabelling everything, wanted to know how she and Colin had spent last evening in Beira. He said it felt good to have both his brother's daughters with him, and he was hoping to get a little rest some time, so that he could take them about.

He thought Monica was still a little too hard for a girl of her age, but she was stunning to look at, wasn't she?

"Takes after your mother," he said, "which means she's not the sort to make a professional man's wife. But I think she'll aim higher. I don't wonder you're all proud of Monica."

But Gwen had no wish to be proud of Monica in the way he meant. She would have loved to know that the affection which had existed between them in schooldays had deepened - or even that it still existed. Now she was beginning to wonder whether it had ever existed at all for Monica.

She left her uncle locking his desk, looked into the empty sitting-room and on an impulse went over to the bookcase and took out the Portuguese-English dictionary. She leafed through a few pages, found there was no word "*aureasinha*" but that the root of it was there. And using the root with a scrap of the language she had picked up she discovered that the senhor had called her ... "little golden one."

She was aware of a sudden ache of knowledge in her heart and throat. Hurriedly she thrust the book back into its place, snapped off the lights and went along to the steamy, scented bathroom.

## CHAPTER FIVE

As he had promised, Colin Reed called in at the bungalow next morning, just as he was setting out for Quelimane. He was too early to see Monica but not early enough to see the doctor before he began to deal with patients who had been waiting since seven o'clock. So Colin's goodbye was addressed only to Gwen.

"Not that I'll be away long this time," he commented. "The preliminary interview isn't likely to last more than a couple of hours, and after it I'll know whether to go ahead with the applications for permits. I do my buying in Beira," he gave that half-wink of his, "where I get a rake-off at a certain store. After that I have to rustle up my usual boys - about eight of them - and get a mechanic to run over the wagon. I always organize at leisure and make an earnest noise about a few things. It goes down well with the customers."

Gwen laughed. "You get far more fun out of impressing your clients than out of the job, don't you? Do you talk to others as you do to me?"

"Not often. Don't you like it?"

"If it gives you a kick I don't mind. But you always make yourself out to be a phoney - and you're not."

"Oh, yes, I am. Ask that sister of yours."

Gwen looked along the narrow veranda. "She doesn't know you."

"She doesn't have to. She's quite a girl, your sister."

Gwen nodded. "You mustn't take too much notice of those cracks of hers. Quick-witted people invariably seem a little acid."

"Are you fond of her?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Don't snap, Gwennie. I shouldn't think she's easy to be fond of. She's certainly not capable of caring much about anyone but herself. She needs to marry a man who'll master her."

"I don't think so," Gwen said slowly. "During the weeks before I came to Mozambique I thought a lot about Monica. I came to the conclusion that she's uncaring and hurts people because she's never been hurt herself and doesn't realize what she's doing. There must be something that could get through to her ... or someone."

"You're blinded by your own relationship with her," he said easily. "You don't see her as clearly as even I can. The fact that you think I'm not a bad guy shows you're only too willing to believe the best of people !"

She smiled again. "Well, you're not a bad guy. The trouble with you is that you take the least line of resistance and don't believe in yourself - the two faults are probably related. I do hope you're going to get your cabin resort by the sea."

"This safari won't fetch a fee like the one I'd get from the Duque, but it'll help."

She dawdled down the steps, asked casually, "How often have you been hunting with the Duque?"

"Twice. The first time there were only three cars, but last year he invited quite a number of people. He's a demon shot."

"He would be. What on earth do these men get out of shooting wild animals?"

"Most of them," he said cynically, "battle through so that they can brag about it afterwards. The Duque likes the chase - the more

violent the better. I've seen him corner a beast and then let it go. The man hates anything to be too easy. I wouldn't mind betting that's why he's never married."

"Do you think Portuguese women are too submissive for him?"

"It's his position, really. Almost any woman would fall over herself to marry him. That doesn't include you, little Gwen. You're one of these incredible creatures who lose their hearts very unwisely but stick to their choice through storm and stress. Well, I'll have to get moving. Give my regards to the doctor. I'll be back this way in about a week."

"Do you have to come here to Cedrillo?"

"No," with a jaded grin, "but I'll come just the same. So long, Gwennie."

When she got back to the house Monica was up and dressed in a button-through blue silk which was intended to look utilitarian as well as pretty, and Uncle George was sorting over some papers on the writing table in the sitting-room. As Sezuko was busy in the bedrooms, Gwen went through to the kitchen, made coffee and brought the tray out to the veranda, where she poured and saw Uncle George seated with his cup. Half an hour later he went off in the car, and Gwen disposed of the tray.

As the morning passed, the slight tension she had been aware of in Monica's presence began to ease. Though Monica did not move far from the garden chair in the veranda, she was good-humoured and normal, and Gwen was only too willing to believe that she had allowed herself to become distressed yesterday over very little. She reminded herself that from her earliest years Monica had made rash statements. "If that puppy doesn't behave I'll kill him with my own hands!" "Some day I'll own seven cars - one for each day of the

week!" "If no one ever gives me a diamond necklace, I'll steal one!" That kind of statement; harmless and absurd. Her announcement yesterday was on the same level; it had only seemed serious because she was grown up now, and poised.

Gwen had always given in to Monica because her sister was older and self-assured, but as she helped Sezuko in the kitchen just before lunch she realized, suddenly, that there was a streak of something in Monica that might never mature ... unless she feel deeply and unselfishly in love, and that was an eventuality which lay in the lap of the gods.

When, at three-thirty that afternoon, Gwen went into the bedroom to change into a suitable get-up for the visit to the Quinta, Monica was already wearing a full-skirted white glazed cotton sprigged with tiny pink flowers. She turned on a heel, clasping her narrow waist with her hands.

"How do I look?"

"Like spring - deliciously cool and heady."

"Why, thanks, darling. I wish I could *feel* cool. Is my hair all right?"

"It hints of hidden flames."

"There are times when you're really good for my ego! Gwen, wear the plain green you had last summer; it's just right with my dress."

"It's not quite dressy enough for this occasion, but I promise you I'll keep off white." Gwen gathered up a pair of tights and a couple of used tissues. "By the way, you have to be rather careful how you speak to the Portuguese. They know English, but not the idiom, and they're starchy - even the young people. You just feel your way with them."



Monica touched a perfume dropper to the hair at her temples. "You're too conscious of other people," she said lightly. "I get by with quite a different technique. I work at my own perfection and then I'm conscious only of that. It's the best boost in the world."

Gwen made no answer to that. She put on a pale blue cotton patterned in black and white, wished it made her look rather older than sixteen and had half a mind to change it; but only half a mind. She had finished her toilet, collected Vasco and was giving last-minute instructions to Sezuko when the black limousine from the Quinta came round the drive.

The two girls put on hats - black straw on the red hair and a white one on the wheaten head - struggled into gloves, took their seats on the commodious back of the car and were driven away by a chauffeur towards the Quinta.

Monica had asked no questions about the interior of the Quinta, perhaps because surprises were another way of creating the small sensations she could not live without. Strangely, Gwen found that all she remembered was richness and brilliant lights, the azulejos in the dining-room. Certainly she was unprepared for the grandeur of the mansion in daylight, though she did remember the drive under the archway between the massive wings of the building, and the fountain in the enclosed courtyard.

There were two or three other cars in the courtyard and a uniformed servant in the spacious entrance. He came down to open the car door, bowed as the two girls got out and went slightly ahead of them to inform another servant of their names. But before the second footman could take charge Renaldo was there, his dark eyes brilliant and keen as he took in their freshness. Did his glance linger upon the pink and white skin and red silky hair? Gwen couldn't be sure, but there was no question as to who received the deeper bow. But perhaps that was

his concession to Monica's extra couple of years. Gwen found herself clinging to such straws.

"I wish you first to meet some of our young people," he said, opening a door into a sitting-room where several young men and women were seated or standing and being served with tea and chocolate. "First, Alfonso Teixeira, who is my secretary. Alfonso has arranged this show for me." Other names followed. "Senhorita Perez, Vitor Cunha, Catarina Capelo and her brother Diniz." There were several more, most of them difficult to memorize.

Monica's effect, among these expensively dressed but sober-hued women, was startling. The younger women tried to mask their stares. The men had definitely been caught unawares. Gwen's fairness had many times electrified the male gaze in the town, but here at the Quinta she was outshone by the vivid beauty of her sister. Gwen had to admit that with Renaissance paintings as a background Monica was at her superb best. She had decided on the pleased, wondering role, and it was just right. Not naive or in the least fluffy, but a blend of breathlessness and sophistication. In no time at all the sisters were separated.

Gwen drank tea with the Capelo twins and Alfonso, the secretary, and when the party broke up she went out with them into a huge *pateo* covered by bougainvillaeas and begonias. Here, the children were finishing off fruit drinks and small cakes, and Vasco immediately took charge of the introductions. More names, children's this time. Gwen acknowledged the introductions with suitable gravity and then permitted herself to be led along to the other end of the *pateo*, which had been screened off. Behind the screens a puppet stage had been erected.

"They're having tea as well - the people who work them," said Vasco. "The puppet show starts in," importantly he consulted his watch, "in twenty minutes' time. While we're waiting I'll show you my room."

"Not today," she said. "Some other time."

"No. I promised you and I have permission from Tio Renaldo. There's one special thing that you'll like, but I'm not going to tell you what it is. Come - we go through here."

Holding her hand, he tried to make her hurry. They passed through a kind of garden room, where gargantuan lilies sprang from ornamental tubs and ferns on high shelves dropped their green streamers to floor level, and into a corridor which apparently ran the length of the reception rooms. At the end they came to the service stairs, and Vasco ran ahead, excited into showing off a little. Up the stairs, along another corridor which turned off into the main upper corridors of the house. These were wide and carpeted in dark red to the edges. There were tall, white-painted doors with gilt shading on the carved panels, beautifully cut crystal door handles, an occasional portrait which must have been brought, with the various Renaissance panels downstairs, from Portugal. A breathtaking mansion, thought Gwen.

Vasco opened a door, stood back and bowed her in. She laughed and hugged him, looking about her at the mixture of old and new. There were a divan bed covered in rich brown damask, two easy chairs, long bookshelves, two large cupboards, one of which stood open to reveal a costly train set with all the gadgets a boy's heart could desire. There were two paintings, one of them showing workers in a vineyard and the other the portrait of a boy who was ... who must have been the boy Renaldo!

"This is the thing you'll like," said Vasco proudly.

It was a huge atlas on a blackened oak stand, and it stood in a windowed embrasure so that the light shone over its ancient surface. The names were in medieval Portuguese, and traced in faded black ink were the journeys of Vasco da Cama and Bartolomeu Dias. Gently, Gwen's fingers touched the old varnished vellum.

"I *do* like it," she said softly. "It can't be quite so old as it looks because in those days they didn't know the world was round."

"Tio Renaldo says the map itself is very old and it's been restored twice. It's to be my very own when I'm fourteen. Vasco da Gama discovered Mozambique, you know."

"Yes, and you're named for him."

"Vasco Renaldo Martoel George Crosland," he said with pride. "I am named for an explorer, *minho padrinho*, *minho avo* and Papa."

"Four very important men. I'm named for my grandmother, Gweneth Mary."

"They're not important-sounding, but they're pretty," he conceded. "You do like my room?"

"It's splendid." But as she spoke she thought how insidious wealth could be. How could the child help but love this room better than the one he occupied at the bungalow? This held treasures, it was spacious and the bell over the bed would summon a servant, and a new toy if he fancied one.

A few times she had been on the point of questioning Vasco about his preferences; now, she was glad she hadn't. He was young and adaptable; it wouldn't hurt him to leave all this behind and find another set of values. In the long run it would do him good, develop his character.

She waved at the portrait on the wall. "I suppose you know all about that?"

He nodded, thought for a moment, and said, "Tio Renaldo was ten. It was painted here in Mozambique and his parents did not like it, so they left it here. I think it is ..." he remembered her word, "splendid!"

Almost as if she had forgotten the child, she said, "I think he looks as arrogant there as he does now. He was probably terribly good at everything and soaked in his own history."

"In fact," said a gay foreign voice from the doorway, "the young Renaldo must have been quite insufferable!"

Gwen turned quickly. Warm colour crept up from her neck. "I didn't say that or even imply it, senhor."

"No, but I begin to know your tones. But no matter, my dear Miss Crosland; if we cannot change your opinion perhaps we shall be able to soften it."

Vasco said, inconsequentially, "There are two Miss Croslands now. Gwen's name is Gweneth Mary."

"So? Gweneta Maria." He paused, as if savouring the name. "You should be Rosita - little rose."

"And Monica?" she asked, dry-voiced.

Smilingly, he lifted his shoulders. "She has made the name her own, I think. When I was young I had a little yacht called the *Santa Monica*. It could behave beautifully, but even on a calm sea it could sometimes become capricious and almost unmanageable."

"The key word there, I suppose, is *almost*. I'm sure you subdued your little yacht, senhor."

"Oh, yes," he said negligently. "I liked it best in a tantrum." He smiled down at the child. "You must go and take your place with the other children now, Vasco. They are gathering for the show."

Vasco skipped out of the room and Renaldo half-bowed, to indicate that they must follow the child. But outside the room he did not move quickly, and Vasco was soon out of sight.

Renaldo said unexpectedly, "The Englishman has left for Quelimane this morning."

"Yes, I know. He came to say goodbye."

"You missed him before during his absence?"

"A bit. Colin's a relaxing sort of person."

Abruptly for him, he asked, "What do you find in common, you two?"

"Just a way of looking at the world, I suppose."

"That cannot be true. His view of everything is coloured by his experience and slackness. He is jaded and a failure, but you are young and vital - you cannot share an outlook with such as he!"

The swift hardness in him was startling. Gwen said, "I don't agree with his outlook - I didn't mean that. I only meant that I do understand how he feels about things." On an impulse she smiled up at him and added, "I'd like to see Colin succeed at something he has in mind. Has he ever told you about a piece of land he owns at a place called Cabo Ponto?"

"No. I'm surprised that he owns anything so solid as a piece of land!"

Gwen was stilled; it was no use thinking she could gain sympathy and assistance for Colin. She said offhandedly, "It was given to him - that's all." She nodded towards a cupboard full of jewel-set metalware. "They must be the only collection of their' kind."

"That is so." His expression was remote, his head rose and he began moving more quickly towards the main staircase. "We must hurry. These entertainers will be waiting for us."

"I'm sorry to have kept you," she said as distantly, and lengthened her pace.

The stiff cotton skirt rustled at this side as they crossed the landing towards the head of the stairs. The carpet was thick and clung to the foot, so that as she put on the speed with which she usually took stairs her shoes were sluggish and held her back. So much so that she tripped ... and was caught so close to a strong chest that she felt her heart thudding against him. For an endless moment she was clutching his jacket and his arm clamped her to him like a band of steel. Then, gradually, he released her.

Very calmly, he said, "The haste was not so urgent that you should risk a fall to the lower floor. Your heart is beating like a pigeon in a cage."

"I was ... frightened, just for an instant."

With irony, he said. "You were also anxious to avoid my touch at your elbow. It was too bad, as you say, that because of it I should be forced to hold you even closer. Come, *pequena*, you will survive the touch of Renaldo de Condeiro. A fall can be damaging, as well as humiliating."

Gwen was so hot that her eyes seemed blinded with the heat. The worst of it was that the avoidance of his hand had been automatic; she hadn't even realized her own hasty shrinking till he put it into words. She glanced at his face, saw that his smile was a little tight, the nostrils thin, his eyes darker and even more glittering than usual. She wished she could think of some light remark, tried and gave up.

His hand took a firm hold on her arm and she went downstairs with him at a moderate pace. He led her through one of the rooms to the terrace and round to the *pateo*, his hand dropped and he told one of the young men to take care of Miss Crosland while he ensured that everyone was comfortably seated.

Among the sea of faces Gwen saw Monica's, watchful and smiling. She sank down on to the silk seat of a gilt chair and felt small pulses throbbing all over her body. It must have been the near-miss to a fall which made her feel so ... so suffocated.

The show began, one of those faultless Continental performances which are a joy to watch. The children were almost silent in their ecstasy and the adults were amused in a well-bred fashion. The puppet figures pirouetted, waltzed, argued and made love. They played scenes from fairy tales, and one sultry-eyed wench moved her mouth touchingly while someone off-stage sang a *fado* - one of those melancholy songs which are peculiarly Portuguese. The show ended and everyone clapped, the children vigorously, though many of them were nearly asleep.

Most of the young ones were carried away by parents or called for by chauffeurs. Vasco was one of the half-dozen who stayed, and it seemed natural that he should lead the others into a room where supper was laid for them.

While the children ate, cocktails were served on the terrace to the groups of adults who still lingered there. For the first time in her life Gwen felt herself to be in need of artificial stimulant, and she was rather glad to find herself with Alfonso Teixeira, the secretary. Alfonso was not talkative, but he clung; the protection of his company was all Gwen desired at the moment.

Monica, she noticed, was persuading or being persuaded by Renaldo to walk in the darkening garden. They went slowly down from the



terrace, Monica animated in her controlled manner and Renaldo smiling at her with shattering charm. They took a long time to disappear, and when they had gone Gwen felt a kind of deadness in her heart and mind. Yet shaken as she was her common sense kept whispering. "You're off your rocker," it told her; "girls are going unbalanced all the time over Renaldo - don't add yourself to his victims!"

To her relief Uncle George turned up. He took a drink, and by the time he was through it those two had come up from the garden, still talking as if there were not time enough in a lifetime for -all they had to say to each other.

But Renaldo at once remembered his duties. "I am so glad to see you here, my dear doctor. You have had a hard day?"

"Yes, I have, rather, and I've a couple of patients coming to the house at seven-thirty. But I thought I'd just take half an hour off between times."

"Will you not sit down and have another drink?"

"I hadn't better, thank you, senhor. I must get my young people home."

Renaldo lifted his shoulders in his inimitable way. "Such a pity. I was hoping everyone would join me for an informal dinner. The children can stay for the night or I can send them home now."

"I'll take Vasco," said the doctor. He smiled. "Keep the girls, if you like."

"I'll go with you, Uncle George," said Gwen quickly.

There was a brief silence. Renaldo ended it, a little crisply. "Very well, if it is unavoidable. I will see you three to the car. Monica has

already said she would like to stay, and I will bring her home to the bungalow myself."

Her sister's name on his lips sent a feathery chill along Gwen's nerves. But Monica's smile was cool and gentle; she was being the sweet older sister.

"You don't mind if I stay, do you, darling?" she said softly, but so that the others heard. "I quite thought you'd stay too, but I know you've been tired since the night out in Beira with Colin Reed." Then, with tender affection, "I won't be late home, Uncle George."

"Please yourself, my dear," replied her uncle heartily. "Will you get Vasco, Gwen?"

Five minutes later Gwen sat beside her uncle in his car while Vasco lolled sleepily in the back seat. The Duque had closed the door and bent for a last word.

"We are ready for another meeting on the new hospital," he said to the doctor. "You must let me know when you will have two or three hours quite free. This time, it is to choose the builders."

"Will Monday afternoon encroach on your own plans? I can manage to be free then."

"Monday at three will be perfect. I will see that the others are advised. *Adeus*, my friend." A pause, then coolly: "*Boas noites*, senhorita."

Vasco woke up to complain, "You didn't say good night to me, Tio Renaldo."

Renaldo glanced down at him through the window. "Goodnight, *pequeninho*. We shall meet again soon."

The doctor let in the clutch, they were circling the fountain when he said, "He's either annoyed or preoccupied. Haven't been talking to him about Vasco, have you, Gwen?"

"No, we have a truce for a week - from yesterday."

He looked her way. "Headache?"

It wasn't strictly true, but she felt too sore for discussion, so she said, "Just a little one," and smiled at him. "Pity you missed the puppets. They were sensational."

This reminded Vasco of some of the scenes, and for the rest of the way home he dilated happily upon the entertainment at the Quinta. Gwen assured herself that she was glad to have left the oppressive magnificence of the mansion. She tried also to believe that she wouldn't mind if she never saw Renaldo again.

Actually, Gwen saw the Duque several times during that week. He arranged a day out in Beira for a dozen people, a drive through his coffee plantations to the Cascata Margarita, which was a wide waterfall on his own property; he put on an excellent film show in the vast ballroom of the Quinta and afterwards there was dancing and snacks were served with wine or coffee. On Friday he gave one of his formal functions - a dinner at which Monica scintillated in the ice-blue creation.

It was on this occasion that Gwen officially met Julieta Vidago. The girl's mother had been very unwell and Julieta had refused to leave her side, but she hoped now to be able to join in some of the fun which Renaldo was organizing for the young people.

Julieta was dark-haired, olive-skinned and prettily rounded; her manner was quiet and serene, but her eyes were shadowed. At coffee, she sat between Gwen and an older woman, and she conversed politely and superficially. Often she looked from Monica to Renaldo, and as she put down her cup she smiled at Gwen and said,

"I always think it must be very hard to have an outstandingly beautiful sister. How fortunate that she is older than you are and will marry first."

"She is lovely, isn't she?" said Gwen simply. "The whole family is proud of Monica. Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"Just one brother. He is arriving in Cedrillo tomorrow and will stay for a while before escorting us home - my mother and me."

"You're leaving soon?"

"Yes," in soft and rather desolate tones, "it is necessary. I have to go home to Lisbon to arrange my trousseau."

"Your ... trousseau!" Gwen bit too hard on the inside of her lip and tasted blood. Steeling her voice, she asked, "How long have you been engaged?"

"It is not quite official yet, but it will be announced before I leave Mozambique. We are to marry in Lisbon in three months' time."

"You must be ... terribly happy."

"Yes, I should be." She looked away quickly. "I do not know these people very well and have spoken to no one about it. My mother forbids the subject."

Her jaw so set that she could hardly move it, Gwen managed, "What a pity. Falling in love must be very wonderful, and one ought to be

able to tell everyone and squeeze every happiness from it. Thank you for telling me, anyway." Her eyes hurt as she turned to watch people unconcernedly laughing and chatting.

For quite three minutes Julieta said nothing. Then she murmured, "I feel that you are different from us - *mucho simpatica*. I would like to tell you all about this betrothal of mine. I feel it is necessary to tell someone, but even Renaldo has said it is not wise to confide in these girls of Cedrillo. You are not of Cedrillo - and there is a quietness about you that is not forced." Her dark eyes were large and appealing. "Will you go with me to the garden room? At this hour we shall not be disturbed there."

I couldn't possibly endure this kind of confidence, Gwen thought wildly. And what about Monica? But she stood up and walked unobtrusively at Julieta's side to the door which was open to the terrace. Circumspectly, Julieta paused and pointed out at the warm, sweet-smelling night, and they drifted out casually, and without haste walked along to the darkened garden room. The door was wide open, but even so the perfume of lilies burdened the atmosphere. The far door, which led into the house, was locked.

"We will keep the darkness," said Julieta. "It is wiser."

"When you have an alternative do you always take the wise course?"

"Mostly there is no alternative to the wise course. One's mother or one's brother or godfather points the way, and it is always the best way."

"Godfather?"

"As it happens," Julieta said quietly, "I have no godfather. Renaldo's father was my godfather, and he died when I was young - even before my own father. "She turned so that the pale radiance from outdoors

illuminated her face. "I am the same age as your sister, and that is a little old for us to be without a *marido* - a husband. With a woman of great beauty like your sister it is different - she can always find a man to marry her. You see how she lights even the eyes of Renaldo."

"Do you ... mind?"

"But of course not. She would make an irresistible Duqueza!"

Gwen felt as if she were being drawn through cold cobwebs. She said stiffly, "What is your problem, exactly?"

"Problem? There is no problem. It is merely that these things are happening to me and I have no one to talk to about them." She shook her head, too emphatically. "No, there is no problem, because there is no way out. My mother and Renaldo have consented for me, and tomorrow my brother will also give his consent. I shall marry in three months' time, and within a month after that I shall be installed in the house near Lourenco Marques, the wife of Alberto Ramos."

It was like the sudden postponement of a death sentence. The tangled sensation in Gwen's throat eased a little. "Let me get this quite clear," she said. "You're not engaged to anyone in Cedrillo?"

"But no. I have just said . . ."

"Yes. You're going to marry a man named Alberto Ramos, of Lourenco Marques. Don't you want to?"

The very thought of stating it in words seemed to alarm Julieta Vidago. 'He is a very good man - only thirty-one and with admirable connections. I knew him five years ago, when I was eighteen and he was anxious to take up the East Africa trade of their business for his father. The family lives near us in Lisbon. It has been mentioned many times that I would become the wife of Alberto, and this year it

was decided finally. In those five years Alberto has been home to Lisbon only twice, and I have seen him alone - that is," apologetically, "with my mother, for a few hours each time."

"You feel you don't really know him well enough to marry him?"

"Oh, yes," quickly. "One knows at once whether one can love a man enough to marry him."

"I don't agree, but we haven't time to go into it now. Be truthful about this. You're not in love with this man, Alberto Ramos, are you?"

Scandalized, Julieta moved her dark head swiftly from side to side as if someone might be listening. "I shall be a good wife to him."

"But you can't marry him if you don't love him!"

"You do not understand, senhorita. He is chosen for me." She paused, and a small cry of anguish was wrenched from her. "If only I had not met Miguel! It was last summer, when we were spending the hot weather at our house near the sea. I ran down with a young cousin to collect shells, and Miguel was there on the beach. He lay reading a book of poetry and watching us. Then next day we hired a boat and he was out there on the bay. He dared not speak to us, but I was happier than I had ever been. That night he tossed a note through my window ... and that was the beginning. I saw him every day, perhaps only for seconds, but every day. Since then he has moved to rooms in Lisbon. He is a law student and is now with a firm of lawyers and studying also. He loves me, but as a husband he would be most unsuitable."

"He sounds most suitable to me," said Gwen, her equilibrium restored. "Do your people know about him?"

"Only of his existence. He is not received at the house."

"Why didn't you talk it over with your brother?"

"Impossible! My brother is of the same mind as my mother."

"Then you should have told the Duque. He might understand."

"Renaldo was my hope," said Julieta despondently. "As you perhaps know, my mother and I came first to Cedrillo with Renaldo and then he took us to the Ramos house at Lourenco Marques. He left us there for a month and then came to bring us here. He stayed for a week the second time and wished to know if I was happy. I told him, half seriously and half as though in fun, that I would be happier if I were going to marry a certain law student in Lisbon. I waited for his interest so that I could tell him all, but he laughed and said I must now think only of the man who wished to make me his wife. I feel here," she pressed a fist to her heart, "that Renaldo is more determined than my mother that I shall marry Alberto. I have accepted it."

"But it's preposterous! How does it become Renaldo's business anyway?"

Shocked back into her habitual sedateness, Julieta drew back her shoulders. "Renaldo de Condeiro is an honoured friend of my family. When his father died he naturally and without question accepted all the responsibilities. In a family where there is only one parent the godfather is important. Until I marry the Senhor Duque is what you call ... my guardian. It is a great privilege!"

Not again, thought Gwen faintly. She shook her head, "These things don't happen in England, so I find them difficult to take in. Do you honestly mean that you'll marry this Alberto Ramos while you're in love with someone else?"

In a tired little voice, Julieta said, "I have no choice."



It was no use urging her to flout her stiff-necked family, to run off and share life with her Miguel in a garret, if need be, till he prospered in his profession. Julieta had grown up as did other girls of her class; sheltered and watched, prepared for marriage by the example of her mother and aunts. As far as they could, they had shielded her from every temptation, but they had reckoned without that sudden magnetism which draws two young people together even when they are forbidden to speak.

So here was Julieta Vidago, fine-looking as Portuguese girls of good family invariably are, normally intelligent, yet so soaked in custom and tradition that she would collapse rather than fight for her heart's need! She wasn't to blame for the weakness; the whole system which made it necessary for a girl to please her family when she married was at fault.

Gwen said gently, "Supposing you did stand up to them - your family - what *would* happen?"

Julieta shook her head. "It would cause only distress and do no good. Renaldo might have interceded for me, but I know he will not."

"But you must certainly ask him!"

"I would not have the courage. He is a friend of Alberto Ramos. He desires the marriage."

"But if you did get him on your side it would make all the difference!"

Julieta had stepped aside and turned her head so that now she was only an outline in the darkness. Intuitively, Gwen knew that she was back inside her armour of dignity. Her next words confirmed it.

"Miss Crosland, it has been very good of you to listen to me. I have spent a week at my mother's bedside, and perhaps my circumstances seemed a little more depressing than they really are. I am afraid I made use of you because I knew you were sympathetic but strange here. I know I can trust you to keep my confidence, and I do thank you very much. If you will excuse me, I will take a short walk along the terrace before I go in."

Gwen watched her go. She stood there in the room reeking of lilies, and somehow was reminded of the smaller pot flowers whose scents were overcome by the power of that other perfume. Julieta's situation was both sad and ridiculous. No doubt an adequate dowry had been set aside for her marriage, so that had she married her Miguel she herself would have been able to carry on living in her accustomed manner and the temporary poverty of her husband would not matter. But no, a prospective husband to one of Julieta's family must more than match his wife's dowry and have a solid background into the bargain. There could be nothing adventurous in marriage; no laughter and making things do, no scrounging enough money for theatre seats, no bargaining in the markets.

Gwen's heart ached. What wouldn't she give to be in love and beloved! Yet that had happened to Julieta and because she feared her family's displeasure and perhaps the loss of the dowry, she was conforming. And on the whole it was Renaldo's fault. How would he feel if one told him that he had forced Julieta to give up the man she loved? He would probably look down the long aristocratic nose of his and smile, without believing.

She made to move, but he was suddenly standing in the doorway.

"Ah, you are here," he exclaimed. "Why have you no light?"

He reached inside and switched it on, a circular fluorescent tube in the ceiling which gave a sort of daylight glow to the flowers. To Gwen's face it was unflattering, but he looked at her in some concern.

"You look very much as if you were on the point of weeping, senhorita."

"I'm not," she said steadily, avoiding his glance. "Perhaps your flowers are a little overpowering."

"You came in here with Julieta, no?"

"Yes, we had a talk."

"Of her marriage?"

"Yes."

"He is a fine fellow, her fiancé. I am very happy about it."

"What more could any girl want than to please the Duque de Condeiro when she marries?"

"You will not speak to me like that," he said sharply. "I know you are finding it a strain to refrain from discussing Vasco for the time we have set, but I still think it is necessary for his sake to wait. You have a feeling of enmity towards me, but I have none towards you, none whatever!"

"I wasn't thinking of Vasco," she said, as calmly as she could. "When Senhorita Vidago told me about her forthcoming marriage, I couldn't help reflecting how glad I am I was born English, that's all."

His glance narrowed. "You love this independence of action, do you not? How can two sisters be so different, I wonder?"

"All women are different, senhor. You haven't noticed it before because to you they've all been Portuguese and willing to be ordered about."

"I was referring," he said in metallic tones, "to the difference between you, and your sister. She will have told you that she agrees with our keeping the child here. I notice also that already she takes much trouble to learn a few words of our language. That is an effort to understand us, but you have no wish to know us well, it seems."

In the odd green-blue light he looked even more sallow and imperious than usual. Gwen trembled inwardly. How in the world had she got into this situation where her heart leapt at the sight of him while her throat ached with tears? As if she did not yearn to learn his language and agree with him about Vasco ... and everything else! It was just that she had to keep her identity ... or drown in her emotions.

From somewhere she conjured a smile. "Monica's accent is good, I daresay. She did well at French." She moved a little, stopped and asked carefully, "Do you think Julieta Vidago is looking forward to her marriage?"

"Surely any woman is anxious for her marriage. It is natural."

"I just wondered. I've seen other women in similar circumstances who looked far happier."

Renaldo shrugged, his humour slightly, if not completely restored. "The Senhora Vidago has been indisposed, and this is Julieta's first public appearance since spending much time in the bedroom. She will brighten, no doubt."

"And if she doesn't?"

He looked down at her speculatively. "What are you trying to convey, senhorita?"

She was tempted to gesture that it was nothing, but in that moment she remembered that small wrenched cry: "If only I had not met Miguel!" So she spoke negligently, but with purpose.

"Give her a day or two, and if you're not satisfied that she's happy, speak to her about it. It would be too terrible if she married the wrong man."

"You are instructing me?" he queried tolerantly. "Come, you are so full of other people's concerns that you give yourself no time to enjoy things." He lifted a finger so that it was no more than two inches from her face. "There is one thing you have never quite believed. I am not a despot!"

"No?"

"No," he said decisively, "but to you, senhorita, I often feel disposed to be a tyrant. There must be a reason for that, because I have only benign feelings towards your sister."

The further mention of Monica jarred. Gwen moved past him and on to the terrace. Monica was there with the secretary and a couple of others. She looked quickly at Gwen, and in that second Renaldo switched off the light and came to them, smiling. Monica touched his arm, shyly but proprietorially, said softly but distinctly,

"Is it too early to ask for a drink, Renaldo? Your climate makes me so terribly thirsty."

Renaldo's reply came as clearly: "Of course you must have a drink. I will mix it for you myself. Alfonso, you will take care of the young Miss Crosland!"

Gwen smiled mechanically at the young man and strolled at his side. She felt washed out and in need of her bed.

## CHAPTER SIX

So far, Gwen had seldom been alone with her sister at the bungalow. Whether, as Monica claimed, most of the enjoyments arranged by the Duque had been for her benefit, or whether his sudden interest in festivities had some other origin Gwen did not know, but both girls had spent as much time out of the house as in it, and when they were there, as often as not Uncle George was at home also. But on the morning following the evening affair at the Quinta, Uncle George found time to take Vasco to see his grandparent himself. Though the old Paivas had their own doctor, they were apt to feel neglected if their son-in-law did not occasionally listen to their symptoms and assure them that for their years they were doing well.

That morning, Monica drifted in and out of the bathroom in her grey silk dressing gown with the rosy pockets, got into black linen slacks and a mid-blue blouse and came out on to the veranda wearing dark harlequin glasses and carrying a couple, of glossy magazines. Normally, one did not wear slacks in Cedrillo, but this morning Gwen, too, had slipped into a pair of grey ones and a white shirt, and after she had helped in the bedrooms and taken a look at the dried salt cod which was apt to become the backbone of one's diet because it was unaffected by heat, she made some coffee and carried the tray to the veranda table.

Monica looked up to thank her for the cup, flipped back a page or two and pointed out an illustration of a satin brocade trouser suit. "Very cute, isn't it? I'd like it in soft blue with a silver thread. Couldn't wear it here, though. It's too hot."

"It's lucky that blue is your colour. You can wear any shade and look cool."

Monica nodded. "In spite of the bright locks. Yes, I'm lucky." She looked across at Gwen through the dark glasses. "You're right about

the heat. I still detest it, but I'm getting used to it, which is just as well. Renaldo says it's hot in Lisbon in the summer."

"Thinking of going to Lisbon?" Gwen asked casually.

"Not at the moment." She sipped her coffee and said expansively, "I feel like a million this morning."

"You look like it, too. Any particular reason?"

"No - unless I'm rather glad about something I heard last night. Did you know that the Vidago girl is engaged to someone in Lourenco Marques?"

"She told me herself. The engagement isn't official."

"Near enough. At any rate, it squashes the rumours of some connection between the girl and Renaldo. I wasn't worried about them, but it's pleasant to know he's never even thought of her in that way. It appears that no one in Mozambique has ever interested him even in a flirtation."

"He must have learned about the ladies in Portugal, then. He certainly knows his way around."

"All the better. So do I." Monica stretched daintily, and made no effort to retrieve the magazine which slid from her knees. She crossed her arms behind her head against the back of the basket chair, and somehow managed to look both lazy and elegant. "You know, darling," she said carelessly, "I think you ought to go home."

Gwen gazed at her, was baffled by the dark lenses and looked away. "Do you? Why?"

"Several reasons. Father only has old Sister Bertram."



"You said she was excellent and quite keen to keep the job."

"So she is, but it isn't fair for both of us to be away from the parents."

"I was already here when you came, but they didn't object to your joining me."

Monica lifted her slim shoulders. "They're accustomed to doing without me. You're the busy little helpmeet. Besides, you're not needed here now. Uncle George only wants one of us."

"That's true. We'll let him decide."

Monica's lips smiled a hurt little smile. "You're trying to hinder me, Gwen, and it's unkind of you. We've got along awfully well together this week, and I thought you were beginning to understand."

"I do understand, but I don't approve." Gwen leant her arms on the table, and her face, as she took an interest in her finger-nails, looked thinner. "You know that I'd be terribly excited and thrilled for you if you fell in love and got married, but this clever hunting of a man simply because he has an old title and tons of cash is revolting. I'm sorry, Monica, but there's no other word for it."

"But, darling," Monica brought down her arms and sat forward in one movement, her expression one of unrelieved consternation and distress, "you mustn't think that! I'm in love with Renaldo. I've thought before that I loved someone, but I know now that I never did - because this is the real thing. Gwen, it's true. If I don't marry Renaldo, I'll never marry anyone!"

Gwen was silent for a minute. Then she said, "Love doesn't happen like that - so that you know even before you meet a man. You can't order it up like the week's groceries."

"Now you're being silly. In any case, you don't know enough about the subject to make flat statements about it. For the last year I've been longing to fall in love with someone like the Duque; I only needed to meet him!"

"Which means that you're not in love with the man himself at all."

Monica sighed patiently. "That's an odd thing to say about a man like Renaldo. Any woman could fall in love with him - even, you, my pet. But you're too young and frightened of love to dare such a thing, and he'd hardly look at you, anyway. I know he does take an interest in you, but it's like the interest he has in children and in helping people like your game-hunting friend. You don't know the man as I know him."

That hurt, probably because it was true. Gwen was compelled to ask, "Does Renaldo behave as if you mean a great deal to him?"

"He's more attentive every day, and recently he's asked questions about the family. He even said that if Father could take a long vacation he might come out here! A man has only one reason for becoming interested in a woman's family."

"Not this man. Our family is also Vasco's." Gwen drew in a dry lip and let it go again. "If you're really in love with him I wish you all the luck in the world. You know that."

"Of course I do - you're a gem." A pause, before she added in the silky, smiling tones, "Wouldn't you really like to go home soon, darling?"

"I think I shall, as a matter of fact - as soon as something definite is decided about Vasco. Like another cup of coffee?"

Monica shook her bright head. "You're too grave, Gwen. And your ideas about love are naive and cockeyed. I'll admit that one occasionally comes across someone quite unsuitable who stirs one a little, but that's the kind of trap to beware of. The man to marry is one who can give you everything you want, not someone who has the knack of making your heart beat a little faster. If you can get both - and I feel that's what I shall pull off with Renaldo - you're one of the lucky ones."

Gwen picked up the tray and moved towards the sitting- room. Her smile was as lively as she could make it. "As a white bride," she said, "you'll be a knockout."

"And I shall have the prettiest bridesmaid ever!" Monica called after her gaily.

Determinedly, as she took the tray to the kitchen, Gwen thrust the conversation into the back of her mind. As Monica had pointed out in her own sweet fashion, when things got beyond her she could go home.

For the next hour or so she concentrated on the lunch. Sezuko had cooked successfully for the doctor and his son for some years, but pleasing two women as well was a little beyond his accomplishments. He was more than willing to have Gwen take over much of the cooking.

She had to cut out soup because of the heat, and now she began to prepare the *bacalhao* which had been soaking for several hours. It always amazed her how creamy and delicious the fish could become; with cheese sauce and a sprinkling of parsley, mashed potatoes and green peas it made an excellent main course for lunch. And there was always a variety of fresh fruits for a salad.

Vasco came into the kitchen, his round ruddy face beaming. "I'm hungry," he said. "How long is it to lunch?"

"About twenty minutes. Let's go and look at the farm."

The hutch for the two small animals Vasco had acquired a week ago was set inside about a dozen square yards of wired-in grass. As companions, they now had a sulky hedgehog, two tortoises and a tiny wild pig that spent its time peaceably rooting amongst the ants. The odd assortment had nothing whatever to do with each other; they ate carrots and greenstuff, slept and explored, and the only sounds came from the wild pig, who occasionally snuffled ecstatically as his blunt little nose pushed into the soil.

"I'd like some of those striped mice," Vasco commented. "They move slowly and they have no tails."

"They wouldn't stay in the enclosure, I'm afraid," Gwen told him. "Even if we had wire of a smaller mesh they'd get out, somehow, and it wouldn't be right to cage them."

"What about squirrels?"

"We'd have to move the enclosure round a tree, because even ground squirrels need to climb sometimes. Do you have them here in Mozambique?"

Vasco said grandly, "We have everything except tigers, and they're like leopards except that they're striped instead of spotted. Colin was just telling me that he might get me some very small animals."

"Colin? Did you meet him?"

"He's here for lunch. Didn't you know?"

Gwen straightened from her crouching position. "No, I didn't. Did you bring him with you from town?"

"He was already here, talking with Monica, when Papa and I came. I spoke to him for a minute and then I was hungry so I came to the kitchen." This reminded him. "I'm still hungry. Is it twenty minutes yet?"

She ruffled his hair, laughing at him. "You've the best appetite of any boy I've ever known. I'll tell Sezuko to dish up. Don't forget to wash your hands after tickling the livestock!"

She spoke to Sezuko, washed and dried her hands. In the bathroom mirror her face was a golden pink, the yellowish hair a trifle dark at the temples with sweat. She looked young and healthy and if there was a slight sombreness in her eyes it only deepened the untried air she carried about with her. She took a look at the dining-table and noticed it was already set for five, then walked across the sitting-room. But they were already moving outside in the veranda and she hesitated. Their voices came through clearly.

Colin's first, slow and exasperating: "You only say that because you know I'm not deceived. Why should I care if you're out to sell your good looks? That's what it amounts to, you know."

"That happens to be the sort of mind you have," coolly, from Monica. "Though why you should set yourself up in judgment is beyond me. No one could do less to keep himself going than you do. As an Englishman in this country you're a disgrace."

"That makes us a pair of disgraceful English," he said equably. "We merely have different goals and no ideals at all. Actually, though," he sounded cynical, "I'm a cut above you. The very last thing I'd marry for is riches."

"You said that was my aim - I didn't. I didn't start this subject, either."

"You looked smug, and talked cosily about Renaldo. If that isn't starting a discussion I don't know what is. You know, Monica, you're a bit of a cheat and you don't like me because I saw it in you the very first time we met. You've never put your heart into anything in your life."

"I'm putting my heart into something right here, in Mozambique!"

"Not you. You're using that mercenary brain of yours and a flair for acting. Your heart is as tiny and hard as a cherry-stone ... but you're the one who has to live with it, angel."

"I'm willing to. And keep your opinions to yourself. When you become a respected citizen in a decent job you'll be in a position to judge others. If you're interested, I discovered something about you, too, the first time we met. You're weak and afraid of responsibility."

"Right on the nose," he agreed, and walked from the hall into the sitting-room. His light blue eyes brightened as he half-closed one of them. "Hi, Gwennie. You look as sweet arid wholesome as fruit and cream. Glad to see me?"

Monica walked past the door and along the corridor. Gwen shook her head at Colin.

"That's no way to talk to my sister. It sounded as if you were being deliberately nasty."

"So I was, in my best manner. For half an hour before the doctor turned up she just sat there, getting at me in even- way she could. I was feeling fed up and I let her get away with it for a while. Then I woke up and had a go at her. It did me good."

"What were you fed up about?"

"This damned safari. One of the men has some trouble at home and we can't get started for a month. I did screw a deposit from them, but it won't go far."

"Poor Colin. If you ever start on that venture of yours you'll have done it the hard way."

"I mean to start, though." He took the whisky and soda she had poured for him. "How about going down to Cabo Ponto with me one day next week?"

"I'd love it. How far is it?"

"A hundred miles. We'll leave about nine and start home at five. Afraid I'll have to ask you to bring the picnic."

"That'll be easy. D'you know, the very thought of skimming down to the coast makes me feel marvellous!"

He laughed. "Makes you look pretty good, too." He turned as Monica came into the room, massaging her newly-washed fingers, and raised his glass. "Here's to both of you, in friendship and malice."

"Very clever," Monica commented in bored tones. "A pity you have to use those wits of yours to earn a living from dumb animals."

Fortunately, the doctor came in just then, and a diversion was caused when the dining-nook curtain was pulled to reveal Vasco already seated at the table and nibbling a roll. Candid-eyed, he stood up politely and explained that he had climbed through the hatch.

Colin Reed hung on at the bungalow during the afternoon. After lunch, Monica went off to the bedroom for a rest, the doctor drove up to the mission to look at a couple of patients, and Vasco began a

piece of complicated carpentry in the veranda, not far from where Gwen sat with Colin.

"At home," said Gwen, "we'd be tearing about on the tennis court this afternoon. I always thought Saturday was the best day of the week - it was so packed with things to do."

"Can't do much here," Colin said, "but who wants to? I ought to look over the wagon and get it greased, but this is too pleasant."

He gave her a cigarette and slipped one between his own lips. Lying back after they were lighted with his colourless hair against a faded red cushion, one leg slung over the arm of the wicker chair and a hand hanging negligently so that the fingers almost touched the floor, he looked shabby and rakish. Ash fell on to his bare knee and he didn't trouble to brush it off; nor did he try to disguise the lumpy darn in the leg of his khaki stocking.

"You need looking after, my lad," Gwen commented. "You'd better let me have your clothes for renovation and cleaning before you set out on safari. Who does your washing?"

"Sometimes a boy, sometimes I do it myself. The things never get rinsed properly, but I wouldn't feel right if my clothes didn't smell of soap. Don't bother with me, Gwen."

"Well, bother with yourself, then. I've told you before that you ought to get married."

He grinned. "I'm coming round to believing that. I'm willing, if you'll set the date."

She smiled back at him, inhaled contentedly and settled further down in her chair. But before anything more could be said a car sounded on the gravel road and swung onto the drive. It passed Colin's wagon



and came to a halt at the foot of the steps. A long white sports model in the luxury class. Gwen felt her lips quiver on the cigarette but she did not move. Colin unwound himself and lumbered to his feet as the Duque came up into the veranda.

Renaldo looked from one to the other of them, seemed to absorb everything in the long glance - Colin's casual seediness, Gwen's appearance of ease in slacks and shirt, the companionable cigarettes with an ashtray in the centre of the low table which stood between the chairs, Vasco along the veranda, rather grubby and intent upon making some sort of box.

Renaldo said formally, "Good afternoon, senhorita ... and to you, Reed. *Boas dias*, Vasco."

Vasco said confidently, "The blamed thing won't come right, Tio."

Renaldo's jaw tightened, but as he bent towards the child there was nothing in his voice to suggest displeasure. "What are you making, my son?"

"A feeding box for the animals. They're too untidy."

"Leave it for now. I will get one for you. Run and make yourself clean, no?"

Obliging as ever, Vasco pushed his tools and wood together and hopped round the veranda to enter the house by the back way. Renaldo's stiletto-glance veered towards the others.

Gwen had sat up. "I assure you Vasco has never used that word before, senhor. It's as well not to make a song about it - he'll soon forget it."

"I am as well aware of that as you are, senhorita. I presume he learned it from our friend, Mr. Reed!"

"Maybe," said Colin. "I'm afraid I'm not used to having children about. I'm sorry."

Colin was tall, but the Duque was taller. He looked across at Colin with dispassionate coldness. "When did you return from Quelimane?"

"This morning. I have a month to prepare for the hunt."

His intonation very foreign, Renaldo said, "But you prepare in Beira, do you not?"

"Yes, but there's no reason why I should stay there. I can run in now and then to make my arrangements."

"I do not remember that you have ever favoured us before with so much of your company."

Nonchalantly, Colin answered, "There was no one to make me welcome, but I never failed to call on the doctor when I came this way." He squashed out his cigarette. "I'd like to thank you very much for putting me in touch with these Quelimane people. They're planning to hunt for seven or eight weeks."

By now, Gwen had disposed of her own cigarette and removed the ashtray from the table. She looked up quickly. "Will you sit down, senhor? The doctor is out, but Monica is in the house."

Colin moved across the veranda towards the steps. "I'll go down to the town for a check-up and some petrol. See you later, Gwen. *Adeus*, senhor."

"Stay for tea, Colin," said Gwen hastily.

"No, thanks. I'll get a drink at a cafe. So long."

The wagon was backing down the drive before Renaldo lowered himself to a chair. He was wearing one of the immaculate beige sports suits that enhanced the width of his shoulders and the length of his leg, and at his throat a wine-red silk cravat filled the discreet gap in his open collar. The dark hair was sleek and showed only the ghost of a wave, and his teeth were very white as he gave Gwen a small set smile. She returned the smile sketchily.

"The doctor will be sorry he was out this afternoon," she said.

"Perhaps he will return while I am here. I presume you will ask me also to stay for tea?"

"Of course. We ... we didn't expect you."

"I am sure of that," he said drily. A pause, during which a tiny pale green butterfly fluttered between them. "You know there is a small *fiesta* in the town this evening?"

"Yes. They were putting out the bunting yesterday."

"Today is the day of Gavalhos - horses. This morning there was a sale of horses in the town, and tonight both buyers and sellers celebrate by demonstrating their horsemanship." He shrugged. "Perhaps it is just an excuse for a festa, but the horsemanship is invariably worth watching. I would like you and Monica and your uncle to join my party."

"It's very kind of you, senhor, but one of us should stay with Vasco."

"When I call for you I will bring a servant for that purpose." The quiet tones ceased, and it seemed a very long time before he added, "I have never seen you look so relaxed as when I came upon you with Reed."

She smiled faintly. "You may not think it, but Colin is a restful sort of person. He doesn't let things ride him, as I do. I always think a man of his philosophical outlook must have had dozens of disappointments to make him that way."

"It is not a state of mind that a girl of your age should envy," he said decisively. "When I have said that Reed is not a suitable companion for you, that is what has been in my mind - his whole attitude." He smiled suddenly. "I would like to see you gay and carefree, and perhaps tonight you will manage it - no? Forget all these people whose troubles you are too willing to share? Can you do it?"

She looked at him with a startled brightness in her eyes which turned them green. "It sounds like heaven."

"Good. Then it shall be heaven." He leaned towards her, his teeth very white. "I did not blame you for that bad word of Vasco's; children will say whatever they hear. It happened that I came here in what one might term an expansive and very forgiving mood, only to find you with that countryman of yours who takes too much for granted. He irritates me, that man. Since you have been here I have felt there should be something I could do about him."

"Really? That's splendid!"

"So?" He stared into her eyes. "There is something you wish me to do for Reed?"

"Well. .. well, yes." She heard sounds inside the house, and ended hurriedly, "If you mean it, I'll tell you some other time."

"I mean it," he said with irony. "It is amazing how the whole of you will light up for such a reason. Some day, you and I must understand each other."

"So long as we're not enemies it might be more fun if we don't."

He shook his head. "No. The understanding must come, even if it is disturbing. But not today."

The next moment he had stood up to greet Monica. Monica, in a superbly simple lilac linen which was edged with white guipure at the low round neck and flared out bewitchingly below the narrow waist. He took her hand and bowed over it, allowed his sparkling glance to rest momentarily upon her creamy throat. It was his brief glances that told most; this one was full of experienced appraisal and admiration.

"You grow more beautiful, Monica, and I had not thought it possible!"

Gwen, looking down at her fingers tracing a pattern on the wicker table, felt dashed and disreputable. Curling, tendrils of golden hair had escaped from the pin behind her ear and they clung damply to her temples. The line of her throat was as clean and without guile as a child's and her lips were deeply pink and without make-up.

She stood up. "I'll see about the tea," she said.

"And, darling," murmured Monica, just loud enough for Renaldo to catch the words, "do change out of those disgusting slacks. You're not in Chesterham now."

Gwen stamped rather hard as she went through the hall, and when she reached the kitchen she pitched Sezuko's scrubbing brush across the room; after which she felt slightly relieved. She set the trolley and put the kettle to boil, slipped into the bedroom and kicked Monica's slacks off the rug where she had dropped them before slipping into an ordinary flowered cotton. She used a dusting of powder, a rub of

lipstick, and went back to the kitchen to finish the preparations for tea.

When she reached the hall with the trolley Renaldo was there to take it. But he did not move at once.- Instead, he looked down at her with a mocking glint in his dark eyes.

"You are a quick-tempered child, and Monica was right. You are not in England, and we in Cedrillo do not care for our women to ape man's attire. In any case," he ended, adding arrogance to the mockery, "you look much prettier in a dress!"

The friendliness was delicate and disturbing. Gwen wasn't even sure that it was preferable to the polished enmity which had gone before. She sat down and watched Monica make a graceful job of pouring tea, and when Vasco appeared she made him sit next to her. The boy sat silent and polite till tea was over. Then, having gained permission to move, he went round to stand between Monica and the Duque, and when Renaldo indicated that he was ready to listen, he launched into a description of the sort of feeding trough he wanted for his animals.

"You shall have it," Renaldo assured him. "And I must tell you some good news. This morning I procured a pony for you, and tomorrow you must come to the Quinta for a lesson."

Vasco's brown eyes could not possibly have opened wider, he went pale. "Tio ... a pony! May I have it here when I am able to ride properly?"

"You have no pasture, but you may ride it here on the grass at the edge of the road. Perhaps one of your cousins will ride with you."

"Gwen?" Vasco stared across at her. "Can you ride?"

She shook her head. "No, but I'll try your pony if he'll carry me "

Monica said, "At Cambridge I rode with Cynthia Warren-Fellard. Their country home was only twenty miles away and I often went there for the weekend."

Vasco looked at her doubtfully. "But you wouldn't ride with me, would you?"

She bent and touched her lips to his forehead, did it beautifully. "Darling, I'd love to ride with you. I'll drive you to the Quinta myself tomorrow morning, and perhaps Renaldo will lend me a good-tempered horse."

"And Gwen must come too."

"Certainly your Gwen must come," stated Renaldo finally, "She must take lessons at the same time."

Monica asked softly, "Do Portuguese women ride, Renaldo? I've never heard of it."

"It is not so common as with the English," he said lightly, "though women of my family have done so when they were young. Side-saddle, of course, and wearing a skirt."

"I'm afraid I'd feel too unsafe in a side-saddle. And I've no riding kit with me."

"Well, you may come and watch Vasco's lessons. And for her own lesson Gwen may wear the things she has just discarded - but only for the lesson!"

Gwen laughed. She made no sound, but the laughter went through her, like a tremor of bliss. She couldn't understand it, decided it wasn't necessary to understand it. When you dissected feelings they seemed to go to bits, and she wanted to hoard this growing sensation of happiness.

The Duque looked at his watch, regretfully stood up. "I must leave you. I have Senhora Vidago and her son and daughter for cocktails. There is to be a discussion which affects only the Vidagos or I would have arranged something bigger for many friends. However, I shall come for you this evening at seven-thirty. We are dining at nine in the private rooms above the Cafe Castanhetas in Cedrillo. You will give my apologies to the good doctor?"

He departed airily, with a paternal smile at Vasco and a wave of the hand to accompany his "*Ate a vista*, senhoritas!"

Gwen transferred the cups and plates from the table to the trolley. Monica sank back into her chair and looked at her long pink-varnished nails.

"He was terribly charming today," she commented. "What did you talk about before I came out?"

"This and that," said Gwen casually. "That's a marvellous dress you're wearing - almost too good for tea on the veranda."

"I heard Renaldo arrive." Unnecessarily, she polished the nails of one hand with the diminutive lawn centre of a lace handkerchief. "What happened to Colin Reed?"

"He always slides away when the Duque's about. They can't stand each other."

"I'm not surprised. Did Colin tell you how much he's getting for this game-hunt he's arranging?"

"Of course not. He's after a few big fees because he wants to give up guiding altogether."

Monica's blue eyes had an opaque look as they met Gwen's. "Does he? Does he have plans?"



"Quite ambitious ones. I don't think he minds anyone knowing about them, but he hasn't told you because you're always so scathing."

"He makes me sick. What are these plans of his?"

"He owns a piece of land at a place called Cabo Ponto. He wants money to be able to build there."

"A house?"

"Quarters, I suppose you'd call them. He'd live there himself and put up men who are keen on fishing holidays and enjoy roughing it. He plans to take them deep-sea fishing."

"It sounds terrible. Have you encouraged him?"

"Certainly I have. It's time he gave up wandering about without a home."

"Oh, I don't know. Game-hunting has an aura; fishing hasn't."

"Maybe he's tired of the aura. I think he's even getting the feeling that he'd like to marry."

"To marry you?" asked Monica in hard tones.

Gwen smiled. "He did half-propose, as a matter of fact, but he wouldn't have, if he'd thought I'd take him up on it. I think our coming here has unsettled him a bit."

"So it should. He's an elder son, yet he allows his young brother to take over the family business and prosper while he jots around tropical Africa, almost penniless. It's ludicrous."

"You're judging Colin by your own standards," Gwen pointed out. "It just happens that he's not the sort to settle into a well-ordered way of living. You have to accept that."

"Well, I wouldn't! And what sort of girl will marry a man who can't even offer her a decent home and income?"

"The sort of girl who'd fall in love with him, I suppose. He'll probably fall for someone quite out of reach and then marry a simple Portuguese woman. On the whole that might be best for him."

"You're crazy," said Monica, and with a vexed whisper of skirts she disappeared into the house.

Gwen lifted her shoulders. It was rather nice to be crazy for once.

Cedrillo was unmistakably in *festa* mood. As well as the bunting of yesterday there were flags and coloured lamps in the trees outside the closed shops, and an occasional rocket rushed up into the sky to dissipate in a cloud of sparks. There came the smell of curries and pies, of sweetmeats of all kinds, of shellfish by the thousand, and of myriads of flowers. Africans watched in awed smiling groups, while the Portuguese of the town forgot the heat of the day in the vivid night. They milled through the narrow streets, all of them making for the Praca Condeiro, where the main cafe, the Castanhetas, had cleared its pavement of tables and opened its balconies overhead to the Duque's party and a few selected guests.

Up in the wide main balcony of the Castanhetas, the Duque sat between old Senhora Paiva, who had graciously consented to watch the events, and Senhora Vidago. Further along, Gwen found herself in delightfully refreshing company, for the young man she had met

only a few minutes ago for the first time was flatteringly conscious of every charm she possessed. He was Jose Vidago.

They were no sooner seated than he said with surprising urgency, "I arrived only today, senhorita, for a short visit to Mozambique before escorting home to Lisbon my mother and sister. I did not for a moment imagine that there could be anyone here so lovely as you!"

He had come by sea and was fresh from a boring journey, she told herself; but his warm glances were distinctly agreeable.

She smiled politely. "Thank you very much, senhor. Have you seen my sister?"

He looked perfunctorily along the row of seats and found Monica. "She has beauty," he admitted, "but red hair is intimidating."

"T shouldn't think that you were easily intimidated!"

"Oh, but I am!" His dark eyes flashed. "But not by you. You are fair and very sweet."

"Come, now. We've known each other only five minutes."

"In five minutes, one knows," he stated positively. "You cannot imagine how I feel about meeting you!"

"I can imagine that you're either awfully impressionable or anxious to impress me. Tell me about Lisbon."

He did, excitably and at some length. He was twenty-six, black-haired, dark-skinned and brown-eyed. He wore the usual white dinner jacket with a touch of flamboyance: a scarlet rosebud in his lapel, two silk points of a handkerchief flopping from the top pocket. On his small finger flashed a ruby in a thick setting of gold. He

worked for a firm of wine exporters and at present lived in the family house on the outskirts of Lisbon.

"But when I marry I shall take over the house for my own family. There will be only my mother - my sister will have married."

Gwen stopped him with a question. "Is your sister here tonight?"

"No. It seems she has caught some slight infection from my mother. She is at the house we are using, with a maid."

"Are you sure it's only a cold, or something like it?"

"Oh, yes," he said easily. "Julieta is never ill." He smiled and gestured. "She is unfortunate to miss this *feira*, but there will be others. Lourenco Marques, I believe, is cosmopolitan in atmosphere. She will have more freedom there than in Lisbon,"

"I don't think she wants freedom."

"Then she may do without it," he said, dismissing all sisters and their problems with a lift of his brows. "And you, senhorita, what do you wish for yourself?"

He was a sudden young man, and Gwen had an exceedingly amusing half-hour parrying his compliments and too intense interest. Then with a blare of trumpets the display began below in the square, and she was able to lean forward on the ornamental parapet and give her attention to the perfect and imperfect equestrian performances.

The show petered out, and they left the balcony for the tables. The Cafe Castanhetas had done its utmost for the Duque, and the foods were numerous and delicious. From outdoors came the roar of merriment, the hissing of fireworks, the sound of accordions. Within, the corks popped and dishes were emptied to the accompaniment of a

discreet band of guitars. It was well after ten when the party broke up.

Dr. Crosland came across to where Gwen stood in the balcony once more, with the young Portuguese.

"I'll have to go, Gwen, but you can stay on for a while. Monica has joined up with a party and you might like to be with her."

"I will take great care of the senhorita," Jose assured him earnestly.

Uncle George raised an eyebrow at Gwen, accepted the assurance and disappeared. The Duque made his way towards them, smiled almost with Uncle George's tolerant expression.

"You have had a happy time, you two?"

"It has been the evening of a lifetime!" declared Jose.

"I believe you, my friend, but for you I am afraid it is over. You must escort your mother to the house, and as this is your first evening she will no doubt wish to speak with you for a while. There is always tomorrow."

Jose looked sad. He took Gwen's hand and touched his lips to it. "This is my first day, but tomorrow the time will begin to have wings. I know it. May I call upon you, senhorita?"

Imperiously, Renaldo put in, "Your mother is waiting, Jose. Give my regards to your sister and tell her I wish her a quick recovery. It is most strange that this malady she had caught from your mother should take so long to show itself."

"It is nothing, I am sure. Senhorita, I cannot wait to see you again!"

"*Boas noites*, Jose," said Renaldo, dismissively.

The young man answered despondently, gave a last languishing glance at Gwen and went away. Renaldo stood there in the balcony at Gwen's side, looking down at the crowds which now thronged the Praça. His smile, when he turned back, was gently mocking.

"What have you done to poor Jose?" he asked softly. "This is a new career for you - to break hearts!"

She laughed shyly, but with enjoyment. "He was terrific, but a little overwhelming. Do you have many young men like him in Portugal?"

"It is not-only in Portugal that young men allow themselves to fall in love with every pretty face. In this case, one cannot blame him. You are very much the golden rose this evening."

A heady optimism brought colour to her cheeks, but she answered demurely, "Thank you, senhor. And thank you for a wonderful evening. Even if I'm lucky enough to see more *festas*, I shall always remember this first one."

"You run to conclusions, *pequeninha*. The *festa* is only at its beginning. I have arranged for everyone. Some go to their homes and others have their own plans. You and I will go into the streets together."

"You and I?" she echoed, looking up at him with unbelieving eyes, her lips parted in astonishment.

"I promised you a gay evening, did I not?" he said lightly. "You will notice I am now wearing a dark jacket. These," lifting them from a pocket, "are masks which we shall both wear. We shall not deceive anyone, but you will find that my people are so entirely courteous that it will be as though none of them have seen us. You would like to join the singing and dancing?"

With Renaldo? Gwen's heart reacted madly for a moment, so that she could not reply. But Renaldo, autocratic and deliberately masculine, slipped a mask over her head and settled it in position, adjusted another to hide his own distinctive eyes and the bridge of his nose, and took her elbow.

"For an hour we will forget everyone, even the brokenhearted Jose," he said. "Already you feel this is a night to remember, but we must make sure of that. Come, senhorita!"

## CHAPTER SEVEN

It was difficult to believe that Cedrillo housed so many people as thronged the streets that night, and the fact that half of them were masked added to the riotous amusement of many. Yet even here, in a *festa*, there was a decorum, an atmosphere of discretion.

But with Renaldo's hand so firmly about her arm, Gwen could have enjoyed any kind of fun. The best of it was that for the most part he went unrecognized; Here and there someone noticed his height and air of command and whispered to someone else, but others were so intent upon their own enjoyment that they were hardly aware of people as individuals. -,

At one sideshow they watched a monkey in a matador uniform play an imaginary bull, and looked surprised and interested when he saw himself in a mirror. At another, wooden balls bounced off a painfully realistic bald head to win the competitor a cellophane-wrapped cheroot. A third booth was devoted to rifle practice and in another the inevitable artist did lightning portraits for a few escudos. There were dozens of booths in the wider side streets, and eventually Gwen collected a few tiny mementos of them which Renaldo dropped into a small white bag brought for the purpose.

He laughed at her excitement, kept a protecting arm about her in the crowds and took her down crumbling wooden steps into the cellar of an inn, where hams hung from the ceiling and barrels of wine were lined up against the wall. To the inn-keeper's consternation they drank right there in the cellar; he had expressed himself willing to clear the saloon for the Senhor Duque, but Renaldo would not hear of it.

"I merely take the senhorita where she cannot go alone, *amigo*," he told the man. "We are grateful for your hospitality. The wine was good."



The innkeeper would have presented them with a whole barrellful and half a dozen hams had the Duque been willing to accept them. He smiled and shook his head, pushed Gwen gently in front of him through the narrow doorway and into the cobbled street.

He looked down at her. "You are not tired?"

She was nothing, except deliriously happy. "Is there anything more to see?"

"The dancing. You would like that?"

There was a note in his voice she could not analyse, but she knew what he expected of her. "Just to watch for a moment, that's all."

She had guessed correctly. The Duque de Condeiro could mingle and have mild fun, but to dance in the streets to the abandoned music of the *feita* was not in his code. He took her back to the square, and from the dimness of the pavement they watched the twirling figures in the coloured lamplight. Skirts and petticoats flew out, feet stamped, earrings flashed not far from the whiteness of the men's teeth. There were shouts of "*Old.. Outra vez!*" And groans when the accordions broke into a staid waltz just to be different.

Gradually she moved with Renaldo round the square. Looking down a side street which was too narrow for festivity, she saw his car, and knew that at last the glorious evening was over. But they lingered there, with the noise and joy all round them and the hot dark night of Mozambique overhead.

*"Illustre senhor, por favor . . ."*

She was dressed in faded gipsy clothes and an old green mask hid most of the pleats in her ancient face. In front of her she held a wooden tray painted on its sides with the signs of the zodiac and

packed tightly with neatly folded coloured pamphlets. On her shoulder perched a lovebird so brilliantly magenta that it must have been dyed.

With that excess of courtesy he always used towards the less fortunate, Renaldo bent and spoke to her in Portuguese, said something which brought a smile to the hardly existent lips. She answered with quavering animation, and Renaldo smilingly translated to Gwen.

"This wicked old one tells fortunes. You reveal your birthday and the improbable red bird does the rest. Do you wish to know what is in store?"

"Only if it's pleasant."

"It will be pleasant. Who would come again to the old *cigana* if she prophesied troubles?"

"All right. August the seventeenth."

Renaldo dropped coins into a leathery old palm, the gipsy woman lifted a small wand and tapped the pamphlets opposite the Leo sign, then pointed the stick to her shoulder so that the bird could hop on to it. She lowered the bird, murmured something, and the small curved beak dipped and brought up one of the leaflets - a badly printed pink one. Gwen took it from the bird's beak, after which he flew back to the old woman's shoulder. Renaldo expressed thanks and led Gwen away from the crowds and towards the car. He was looking down at her with those brilliant, mocking eyes.

"You wish to puzzle through that nonsense for yourself, or shall I read it to you?"

"Read it, please."

"We shall need light. Come into the car."

He seated her and switched on the interior lighting, dropped the masks on to the seat between them and opened the flimsy sheet of paper. He read a little Portuguese aloud, lifted an eyebrow and said,

"There is the usual statement about Leo people and their idiosyncrasies, but at the end there is a rhyme; I am afraid it will not rhyme in English. It says you have a secret in your heart which only one other will ever know, that you will marry at the time of the wine-making and ..." He broke off and flicked the paper into her lap with a teasing smile. "There is little more."

"But you didn't finish!"

"These things are printed in Portugal for superstitious *campesinhos* who drink potions and read the signs. Such people are eager to believe that they will spend their wedding night amid flowers and be blessed with several sons!"

Gwen's cheeks burned; she was thankful for the sudden darkness into which he had plunged the car. But with a small mischievous smile in her voice, she answered, "Oh, is that what it says? All I have to do is wait and see if it comes true."

Without much expression he asked, "In spite of that unsuccessful affair in England you wish to marry?"

"I wasn't much in love, really - I only thought I was."

"It's natural to hope to marry, isn't it?"

"Of course, but you have this English outlook which at times I find puzzling, to say the least." He turned slightly her way, with one arm on the wheel. "Tell me, what is it that you wish me to do for Colin Reed?"

It took Gwen some seconds to adjust her thoughts. "Oh, yes ... Colin," she said. "You're rather contemptuous of him, aren't you, senhor?"

"He does his best to rouse contempt."

"Not really - he merely isn't like other men in this country. I'm fond of Colin. I think ..."

But he had stiffened. "You say it out like that! You love this man?" he demanded.

"No, not *love*. You can be fond of someone without loving him."

"But one does not tell it so naturally, without restraint, unless there is deep feeling which is returned!"

"Well, I think Colin's fond of me, too, in the same way. There's nothing shattering about it, but we really like each other. There can't be anything wrong in that."

"Go on," he said briefly.

But the swift appearance of that other side of Renaldo had put Gwen slightly off-stroke; for the first time since they had left the Castanhetas she remembered that he was the Duque de Condeiro, aloof and invulnerable, a rigid adherent to the customs of his own people.

"But you, senhor," she said. "Haven't you ever been fond of a woman - just fond? It's the basis of all good friendships."

The alien accent in his tones became marked. "I am not a boy, senhorita, and I am not made of stone. I do not believe very much in your fondness between the sexes, without love. It is too much *to* expect that in both the passions will remain dormant. You know

already that I disapprove of this close friendship of yours with Reed. You are unawakened, but he is not!"

To Gwen, his vehemence seemed a little unnecessary. Amazing how easy it was to touch that hot blood of his to life. Would he be the same in love? she wondered. And she felt her knees tremble.

But she spoke calmly. "I suppose it takes an English person to understand Colin. Do you still want to help him?"

"For you? Perhaps. He needs money, of course?"

"Yes, but only the chance of earning it; he doesn't want a loan. You see, he has a plan for the future." She outlined it, did her best to make it sound solid and attractive. "The way his money comes in from safaris," she ended, "he's likely to get tired of the scheme almost before he'll have a chance to build."

"So you wish him to earn the money. How?"

"I don't know. He doesn't seem to have concentrated on anything but wild animals."

Renaldo sounded unsympathetic.. "That is so. He is already engaged for this safari with the businessmen of Quelimane and one cannot do much for him till it is over. But I will offer him enough timber from my own forests for his project in return for the extermination of pests among the cacao - on condition that he does not begin to build till he is free of all obligations. If he is fortunate, the log buildings he wants will be complete before the rains. There is good deep-sea fishing not far off-shore during the rains."

"You're very generous, senhor. May I tell him?"

"I will tell him myself. A man's business should not be conducted through a woman."

Which, she supposed, rather put her where she belonged - among the young people in whom he invariably showed a ducal interest and nothing more. She felt him straighten behind the wheel and fit a key into the ignition, and she thought, a little bleakly, it's all over - this will never happen again. In the darkness she picked a piece of fluff from the yellow skirt of her dress and then curled her fingers into a fist.

Through the car window came the sounds of revelry, muted by distance, and the scent of geraniums from window boxes, which were high on the wall across the narrow street. There was a sensuously somnolent feel about the night, and as the silence between them deepened Gwen felt her eyelids droop hotly and a tremor along her nerves.

Without haste, Renaldo set the car moving. Gwen stole a glance at him, saw him cool and withdrawn and knew a surge of pain and love; he could be so very dear. The evening had been packed with the enjoyment of small insignificant things; the sideshows, the spectacle of dancing, the haunting discord of the fado, the posy of tiny flowers which even now was threaded into her hair, the quick sips of wine in the innkeeper's cellar, the fortune-teller. She had shared them all with Renaldo, but already he was forgetting.

It took only a few minutes to reach the doctor's bungalow. A light glowed in the porch and Renaldo discovered that the door was unlocked. He pushed it open slightly.

"It has been a most refreshing evening, senhorita. You were charming."

"You, too, senhor," she said with determined lightness. "The pity of it is that such evenings have to come to an end."

"*Sim*, senhorita," he said softly, "but for some people such evenings are the beginning because they end with a kiss."

Her heart pounded suddenly and deliciously up in her throat, the door was pushed wider and as he bent he was close to her, so close that his lips brushed her temple. She heard the murmured goodnight and was unable to answer, and then the car was speeding away and she was walking, rather blindly, into her bedroom.

With a plunging sensation of relief she saw that Monica was not yet home. Bewildered, frightened and excited, she stared at herself in the mirror, saw the yellow dress and the little white bag full of mementoes on her wrist, the withered posy in her hair and a pair of sparkling hazel eyes. In a drowning kind of bliss she undressed and got into bed, put out the light. When Monica came in half an hour later she pretended to be asleep, but she was thinking and feeling. Thinking, impossibly, that the fortune-teller had predicted that she would marry at the wine harvest, and distinctly feeling the electric warmth of Renaldo's mouth at her temple. Intended or not, that suggestion of a kiss lent a golden haze to the whole evening.

The world next morning was dreamy and pearl-like. Monica was too tired to get up, and she shuddered when Gwen exercised in front of the window.

"Go away," she said, "and don't let that child come in here."

"Did you have a good time last night?"

"It was ghastly. I was with some people named Figueira and those Capelo twins. What did you do?"

"I walked about, threw balls at a bald head and won a diminutive plastic doll at quoits."

"Sounds frightful, but you're perky this morning," Monica lifted a weary head from her pillow. "You've still got pink daisies in your hair."

Gwen laughed, and rootled them out. "I'll press them in memory of my first *festa*. Don't look such a grouch, Monica! It's a heavenly day."

"I can't face it yet."

"You're supposed to be taking Vasco to the Quinta for a riding lesson."

"So I am. Renaldo told me particularly at dinner last night that I mustn't forget. By the way," she sat up resignedly and shoved a hand over her disordered red hair, "pass over my evening bag and I'll show you something he gave me."

Gwen didn't want to see it; life was just right as it was. But she gave Monica the bag and waited. Monica scooped out a handful of odds and ends, dipped again and brought out something which lay in the palm of her hand. Gwen looked at it, touched it with a forefinger. It was a heavy charm in pink jade and gold, no more than an inch square. Exquisitely carved, it was a tiny replica of a chapel even to the markings of the tiles and the twisted pillars at the entrance.

"Renaldo gave you this?"

Monica nodded. "I didn't want to take it, but he insisted."

"At dinner last night?"



"It was just as we were taking our seats. He said he was sorry he couldn't sit with me, but there were older women... you know how it is at these functions. Then he pressed this into my hand and smiled in that way he has, and said that he was arranging for me to spend the evening with the Figueiras because duties would keep him busy. Look nifty on my gold chain, won't it?"

Gwen agreed it would. "I was instructed to learn how to handle a horse, too," she said.

"I shouldn't bother - you'll never need to know in England." Monica pondered, tossing the pink jade in one hand. "Look here, why don't you take Vasco fairly early and come back? I'll go mid-morning and bring him home later - though we'll probably be asked to stay for lunch."

Gwen acquiesced. She took a shower and hesitated before getting into the pink slacks and a pink and white striped blouse. She might as well show willing.

Her uncle had decided on a lazy morning, and Sezuko took breakfast to him in his room. Vasco ate with Gwen, and could talk about nothing but the new pony. He was so feverish to see it that he could hardly wait to get started in the car. Uncle George, looking into the sitting-room a little later, said that if he found he would need the car he would phone for it.

"I don't like this pony business," he said. "I know Renaldo didn't acquire it just now for any particular reason, but every detail of that kind makes things harder for me. Soon he'll be asking me to sign the forms for the school in Beira."

"Tuesday's the deadline," Gwen said. "Our truce ends and we have a discussion. You haven't wavered at all, have you? You're still as keen for Vasco to be educated in England?"

"Every bit," said her uncle firmly. "Why shouldn't I want him to be more English than Portuguese?"

"Of course you should," said Gwen warmly. "They've cornered you, but you're not alone in the corner. We'll fight them together, Uncle George.-"

"I wish Renaldo hadn't bought the pony."

"Perhaps it's not so important. Vasco can't keep it here and he'll be going away to school."

"But at the Beira school," her uncle sighed, "they have stables and all the rest of it."

"He's not going there," said Gwen flatly. "You must put your foot down very hard."

"I mean to, but it's then that the fuse will be lit. Oh, well, it has to come. Enjoy yourself, Gwen."

He went through to his office and Gwen went out to the car, where Vasco was impatiently sitting astride the back of the seat.

"You can't ride your horse in here, my lad," she said. "Get comfy. We're off."

It was the first time Gwen had taken that road so early in the morning. The air had lost its pearliness and become crystal clear though already a hint of the heat to come pressed in through the car windows. She saw people coming from church, women wearing mantillas and men correctly dressed and cheerful-looking. It was almost the only time one ever saw husbands and wives together outdoors.

She reached the drive to the Quinta, was alive to every shade of green in the trees, the cream and pink of magnolias and camellias. She drove under the archway, and before she had stopped the car at the steps Renaldo appeared, with the effervescent Jose Vidago at his side.

Renaldo opened the car door, allowed Vasco the dignity of sliding out on his own two feet and reached a hand to Gwen.

"*Ola*, senhorita," he said gaily. "Your face is a flower even if you do come as a boy."

Gwen loved his mood and felt that she didn't care who knew it. She wondered if people could read in her face what a relief it was to have admitted without reservations that she loved Renaldo. Still, it was as well to hang on to part of the reserve, if she could.

'Are we too early, senhor?'

"But no. I would not forgo the pleasure of seeing you so fresh with dew."

"Good gracious", she heard herself saying. "How nice!" She smiled happily at the hot-eyed young man who had insisted on taking her hand. "Good morning, Senhor Vidago."

"I am your slave, senhorita!"

"Oh, please. I wouldn't know what to do with one."

"Jose finds that our climate goes a little to his head," said Renaldo tolerantly. "He has not been before to Mozambique." He waved towards an archway which led through to the side gardens. "We have chosen a mount for you, senhorita."

"I came to bring Vasco," she said. "I don't think I'd better ride."

"You will certainly ride," Renaldo stated. "I will not have even an English miss arrive at my house in such clothes without the best of reasons. But first you may watch the efforts of Vasco."

Jose Vidago stayed close to Gwen's side and he seemed to be talking a great deal, though she heard very little that he said. They came to a wide path bordered by an ornamental parapet, and involuntarily Gwen looked back and up at the magnificently sculptured walls. She was caught by the topaz brilliance of sunshine across the stone.

"This is a most beautiful place," she said.

"A setting for a beautiful woman," Jose hastened to assure her.

Renaldo said smoothly, "Jose has admitted to a terrible weakness for fair women. You must beware of him." A pause. "Why has your sister not come with you?"

Gwen stopped suddenly, remembering. "That's one of the reasons I can't ride. Monica came in very late last night, and she suggested I bring Vasco and go back with the car, so that she could use it. If I go now she'll be here within an hour."

"You will stay and ride," Renaldo said decisively. "I will send a car for Monica."

"But of course you will stay," urged Jose. "I myself am going to teach you to ride. I am the best horseman in the whole district of Lisbon!"

Renaldo's brow took a familiar slant. "So? Some day we will test you, my young friend."

"I have performed in the bull-ring, Renaldo!"

"Which is not to your credit. I have always been glad that we abolished the bull-fight in Cedrillo." He paused and indicated a rose bed to their left. "Your golden flowers, senhorita. If they were not already named I would call them the Gweneta-Maria."

"You're lavish with your compliments this morning, senhor!"

"Perhaps it pleases me that at last you look happy and forgetful of the burdens of others." He let another glance rest for a moment on the warmly smiling young man at her side. "I have yet to decide who is responsible for the change, but for the moment that is not important. Ah, here we are, and Vasco is there before us. Well, *pequeno*," he called, as he held back the gate into the pasture, "what do you think of the black pony?"

Vasco was so ecstatic that he cuddled the pony's foreleg. Renaldo laughed, showed him how to slip his foot into the stirrup and helped him to leap up to the saddle.

"The length is perfect," he said. "Now, first I will walk round with you myself, and when you are accustomed to the feel of the saddle you will ride a little with the groom. Come, a movement of the rein ... so ... and the little horse moves. What name shall we give him?"

Gwen did not catch the reply because they were already a few yards away, and also because Jose was urging her towards a shy-looking filly. The filly was named Belita, had a velvet nose and a coy glance; she was as tame as a spaniel. With Jose's assistance Gwen found herself in the saddle and took the rein. He came beside her on a chestnut, gave her a few instructions and they started at a walk which gradually lengthened into a slow loping motion. It was exhilarating, Gwen found. She felt appallingly unsafe, but the present deliciously taut condition of her nerves heightened the excitement. She felt the breeze through the pink and white blouse, her hair rising as if lifted

by cool fingers, and she was aware of the flattering gaze of the young man at her side.

"Yesterday," he said easily as they jogged along, "you were calm and pretty. Today you are prettier and the calmness is gone. I think already I am in love with you, senhorita."

"You have me at a disadvantage, senhor. Except for a . ride round a friend's farm in England on the back of a weighty carthorse, this is my first attempt to manage a steed. I'm unable to give you the answer you deserve!"

"But surely one who loves deserves well? I am certain you are not cruel!"

"No, but I'm down-to-earth. Shouldn't you be teaching me how to sit and hold the rein?"

"You are doing superbly. Do not use the stirrup too much or you will ache. Tell me, did you sleep well last night, after meeting me?"

"I slept wonderfully."

"But you dreamed of me?"

"I didn't dream at all. Do you ever use a whip, senhor?"

"Please call me Jose. A whip? Sometimes, when I am in the mood for it. You know these pastures well?"

"I don't know them at all, but you should be able to see the Quinta. I daren't look back myself."

Amused, Jose turned in the saddle. "The house is hidden among trees, but I can see where it must be. We are not really going fast."

"I'll make do with this speed. I must say I like it."

*"Bern!* Now we will stop, gently ... and you will learn to mount."

It was all very enjoyable, even Jose's admiration and the excuses he fabricated for helping her on and off the filly several times. Time slipped by and she grew a little tired. The heat today was impregnated with humidity, and she could feel her clothes sticking to her waist and back. They walked back towards the Quinta under the trees. Jose held the loose reins of the horses but never once looked at them; he was far too occupied with the slim young woman at his side. For him, this experience of being alone with a pretty girl who had no tricks was unique and therefore headier than any wine he knew.

"It's late," she said eventually. "I do hope the Duque remembered to send for my sister."

"Renaldo would not forget such a thing. You saw how disappointed he was that you arrived this morning without her!"

Gwen looked at him quickly. "No, I didn't notice particularly. Had he spoken about her?"

Jose shrugged. "I came to borrow a horse and already Renaldo had finished breakfast and was waiting. He said he expected you and your sister and the boy. I remembered the titian hair, and asked him about your sister. He said she was very beautiful and was surprisingly quick to comprehend the Portuguese. She had asked to visit the private chapel here, and he thought it would be a good opportunity this morning, while the groom took care of Vasco and I had charge of you."

"I see." She walked in silence for a minute. "I expect Monica is already here. Do we leave the horses loose in the pasture?"

"There are boys on duty who will brush them down." He threw the reins to one of them and opened the gate in the hibiscus hedge. "You will be a little worn after this first ride, but the stiffness will disappear when you are more accustomed to it. We must ride every day."

Gwen made no answer, but Jose was not deterred. It was astonishing how much he found to say. They walked through the formal gardens, and at a wide cross-path he slowed and waved a hand.

"Up there is the chapel - you see it? The azulejos were brought from a ruin in Portugal and set in the wall above the door. Inside, so my sister tells me, it is the most marvellous chapel in this country."

The chapel stood at the end of the wide avenue about three hundred yards from where they had paused. Ilexes and flowering bushes lined the road and other paths joined it from other parts of the garden. The sun glinted on the gilding and on the tiles, and the twin steeples stood out brilliantly against the sky.

As they watched, two figures appeared from one of the paths and turned up towards the chapel; the tall immaculate form of Renaldo and the slim, white-clad daintiness of Monica. They sauntered companionably, Renaldo's head bent her way.

Gwen moved on, said to Jose, "There's Vasco, on the terrace. I must take him home:"

"Not yet, I beg of you! Renaldo will certainly wish you to stay for lunch."

"Not in this get-up." She smiled briefly. "It's been very pleasant and you've helped me a lot, but I must go."



He was facing her imploringly. "Senhorita ... dare I ask you to honour us at dinner tonight? Already you know my sister, and my mother would be pleased to welcome you. We are guests in one of Renaldo's houses and have the use of a car. I will call for you."

"Not tonight, if you don't mind."

"Tomorrow?"

"I'm not sure."

"May I call upon you?"

"Well, yes, if you really want to."

He said fervently, "I want it more than anything in the world!" By now Vasco had seen them and was running towards them on the drive. He was dazed with success and got into the car without a word. Gwen slipped into her seat, smiled out at Jose.

"You might tell the Senhor Duque that my uncle is expecting Vasco home for lunch. Thank him for lending me the filly."

"I will do that. May I follow in my car and escort you?"

She smiled. "Please don't. *Adeus*, senhor."

"Jose!"

"Very well. *Adeus*, Jose."

The car moved away and as she changed up she ground the gears - couldn't help it. But the noise steadied her.

Vasco said sleepily. "When people talk to you or Monica they often forget to say goodbye to me. Jose is a good rider, isn't he?"

"Horseman - yes. It won't take you long to learn."

"It was lovely," he sighed happily. "Tio Renaldo says I may ride every weekend and sometimes late in the afternoon on weekdays if it isn't too hot. Isn't my pony wonderful?"

Gwen nodded. "Did you decide on a name?"

"Not yet. Tio Renaldo says I may call him an English name if I wish."

Big of Tio Renaldo, thought Gwen. After which she deliberately kept all her attention on the road.

Gwen was up early next morning. Yesterday's excessive heat had left a heaviness in the air and by mid-morning the sky was overcast. Rain, Uncle George said, was unlikely, but a little dry-season drizzle had been known and he hoped it would happen. Even a light rain freshened the garden no end.

Gwen drove Vasco to his aunt's house for lessons, did some shopping in the town and returned to the bungalow by a roundabout route which crossed the river. Below the bridge she saw Colin scouring his set of pans with sand, and she braked and went down to him.

He winked up at her from where he sat on his haunches at the water's edge. "How's tricks?"

"So-so. Why didn't you come and see us yesterday?"

He took another handful of soil and plopped it into the saucepan he held. "I did come to the bungalow yesterday morning. Didn't Monica tell you?"

"I haven't spoken to her since then."

"Did you have a row with her, too?"

"Of course not. She was out all day yesterday and she was sleeping when I left the house this morning. What did you row about?"

He rinsed the pan. "Things," he said vaguely. "It's not difficult to find something; she and I could quarrel about the date. Anyway, I thought I'd stay away from your place for a day or two. What about that day at Cabo Ponto - can you manage it on Wednesday?"

"Yes, I think so, but call in before then. What about supper tonight?"

"I'll think about it." He straightened, gave her a glance which was oddly compassionate. "Be careful with that sister of yours, Gwen. She's as selfish as all get out, and she's on the warpath. I'm afraid I let you down yesterday."

Gwen stared at him. "But how could you?"

"Not purposely -I wouldn't do that. When I saw Monica yesterday morning she was dressed to kill, so I made one of my usual remarks about women who deck themselves out to attract the male and said you were worth ten of her and that any man who had as much knowledge of women as Renaldo would see it. That was when we really got hot with each other."

"Oh, dear. Perhaps it's fortunate that she spent the whole of yesterday at the Quinta." •

Colin shrugged. "She might make a good wife for the Duque at that; she has everything it takes. It wouldn't bother me if she weren't so damned calculating about it. I wouldn't mind betting that she came out here for the express purpose of snaffling Renaldo. She's capable of it."

Gwen pushed hand into the pocket of her dress. "You're being very uncharitable, Colin. Why should you hate my sister?"

He grimaced. "It's what she does to you, and that double act of hers with your uncle. She sets a match to his pipe, fetches his slippers, pours the tea just how he likes it, calls him darling ..."

"So do I."

"But you don't let him down behind his back. She said point-blank yesterday that she agrees wholeheartedly with Renaldo's views about Vasco. She told me she often discusses it with the Duque."

"What did you say?"

He laughed. "Something I wouldn't like to repeat - you're too young. So if I don't turn up to supper tonight you'll know that I'm playing safe. Take a seat in the wagon and I'll make you some coffee."

"Sweet of you, Colin, but I haven't time. Uncle George will want the car. Do come up this evening!"

He grinned at her and went with her to the car, waved as she moved off. Gwen wondered a little as she drove, but came to no conclusion. She drew up at the bungalow and carried the goods she had brought through to the kitchen. There she washed and made some coffee, took a tray set for three along to the sitting-room.

The room was empty, but as she began to pour both Monica and Dr. Crosland appeared from different directions. Uncle George sank into a chair, but Monica stood near the door, twirling a hat. She wore flowered silk and high-heeled shoes, and from her wrist hung a thin gold chain that dangled pieces of shaped gold and onyx and enamelware ... and the pink jade charm.

"Going out, Monica?" asked her uncle.

"I think so," she said sweetly. Then she looked across at Gwen, and the blue eyes were sapphire-hard. "I won't have coffee, thanks; it makes one too hot."

"You'd be cooler sitting down," said her uncle. "It's not so hot today, anyway - no sun."

Monica shook her head, smiling at him. She walked to the window and stared out, looked at her watch, and went back to her bedroom. Uncle George finished his coffee and went off in the car. Gwen put the things together on the tray, but before she had lifted it Monica was back in the room. She still carried the hat and her handbag, but every vestige of sweetness had gone from her expression, and her eyes were harder and brighter than ever.

"Renaldo is calling for me at eleven-thirty, and I want you to keep out of the way till we've gone. I won't have you looking woebegone, so that he invites you to go with us."

"Monica, what on earth . . ."

"After Saturday, I just don't trust you! I hate to think you're jealous, but I've no alternative. You deceived me yesterday morning without a blush, and heaven knows what else you'll do if you get the chance."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"You know well enough. I asked you how you'd spent the evening of the festa and you let me believe you'd been with a crowd, doing the sideshows. Renaldo told me yesterday that you'd spent a couple of hours with him."

"I didn't mention it because ..."

"I know darned well why you didn't mention it! But you reckoned without Renaldo, who never has to hide anything he does. How dared you persuade him to take you into the streets that night!"

Gwen braced herself. "I didn't persuade him, and it's no use your getting angry with me. Renaldo does what he wants to do, nothing more nor less. He apparently wanted you with him the whole of yesterday, and you're waiting for him now, so what are you sick about?"

The beauty had faded a little from Monica's face; she was white and threatening. "I won't have you undermining me or getting ideas about yourself. We haven't seen much of each other lately, but I've watched you when I could. Something's happened to you, and I think I know what it is. You've found that there are other men besides Howard Greer. You've made up to Colin, and there was that young man on Saturday - Jose Vidago. He couldn't stop talking about you at lunch yesterday. It was he, I suppose, who flattered you into thinking the sky was the limit. Dear little Gwen became intoxicated with her own potentialities!"

"Don't be absurd, Monica. I don't think you even know what you're saying."

"I know - and so do you. You're floored by Renaldo and experience with these others has given you courage."

Gwen was cold-but calm. "You're way off beam. I like Renaldo, and so does every woman who meets him, but as you've said before, his friendliness to me is like that which he has for children. You're close to him, Monica - much closer than anyone else here has ever been. You certainly don't have to worry about me in that connection."

Had Gwen thought more before speaking she would have known this was an unwise thing to say to her sister. Monica had never in her life

competed with Gwen, and even the suggestion that she might now have thought along those lines was, to Monica, a kind of treachery to her own practised personality.

The blue eyes blazed. "I'm tired of this - tired of your siding with Uncle George and getting under Colin's skin so that he taunts me! Before I arrived here Renaldo had invited you only once to the Quinta for the sake of politeness. Since that evening when he called to welcome me we've been asked to all kinds of functions, and the inference is obvious. I suppose it's inevitable that you should envy me, because I have a great deal that you haven't, and it did annoy you when I told you I'd come here to Mozambique for the purpose of meeting the Duque. But you're carrying your resentment too far."

"I've done nothing whatever against you - nothing at all."

"That isn't true. You've discussed me with Colin Reed in terms as unflattering as you could make them. I can tell, by the way he goes for me every time we meet. You're the gentle one, the quiet one who should be taken care of! Not that I care about Colin," she said swiftly, her jaw tightening, "but I do care when you use your claws in other directions. I won't stand any more of it. From now on, you'll stay away from Renaldo!"

Gwen's throat was painful. "Aren't you being rather ridiculous? Renaldo is only just about aware that I'm alive."

"Then let's keep it that way! I want your promise, Gwen."

"That I'll keep away from Renaldo? It isn't necessary." Gwen quelled a thrust of bitterness. "He's promised that tomorrow he'll discuss Vasco, but Uncle George will be there."

"And you won't," said Monica tightly. "I'm the elder, so I'm the one who'll take part in the discussion. I'll see that it takes place at the Quinta, so that you needn't be anywhere near."

"You're taking enormous precautions, considering I'm only small fry."

"I believe in them, darling," said Monica, her glance stony and calculating. "That's why I'm going to suggest to Uncle George that you go home as soon as possible."

Gwen ignored the final stab. "You'll side against Uncle George in the discussion, won't you? Do you think that's fair?"

Monica shrugged. "It happens to be my opinion that Vasco will be happier here than he would be in England. Besides ..." she paused, "agreement on such subjects is what Renaldo will expect from the woman he hopes to make his wife. It's out of your hands, Gwen. Forget it, and start packing."

Gwen's jaw was so taut that it hurt; she forced it to relax, felt a muscle twitch several times before she could say, "You're not in love with Renaldo. You may pretend you are, but you're not. And if you were to marry him without loving him you'd come to grief in a big way. From the moment he discovered that you married for money and a position your life wouldn't be worth living - he'd see to that."

Monica smiled a smile that was full of enmity. "He won't discover it because it won't be true. I'm in love with Renaldo and I'm pretty sure that he's in love with me. But he's thirty-four and far too wise to hurry into marriage. After all, I've only been here a week and no man is going to propose on such a short acquaintance. I have to be patient, and I can be, so long as you're not around all the time, looking innocent and disapproving. You get in my way, and I won't have it!"



"Even so, I'm not going home unless Uncle George himself asks me to go."

Monica's eyes narrowed. "You think you can get round him as you got round Father, don't you? Well, just try, and see where it gets you."

Feeling wretched, Gwen said, "Monica, what's happening between us? There's been nothing like this before, and you must know that I wouldn't do anything to injure your chances with Renaldo. I wouldn't want you to marry him unless you loved him, but even if it happened I'd want a successful marriage for you. You must know that."

Monica's voice was icy as she answered, "I only know that you're jealous, and that jealousy could make you do things you don't want to do. If you're really keen for me to make a successful marriage you'll go home to England and leave me to handle everything in my own way."

Gwen shook her head. "It isn't the answer."

"That means you'll resist anyone who tries to send you home! You have a reason for staying."

"Only the one that brought me here. If the Duque will consent to my taking Vasco back to England with me, I'll leave right away."

Monica flung back towards the window. "You're impossible, but I won't put up with any more of your interference. You're to stay clear of the Quinta. I'll tell Renaldo that we'll postpone the discussion till Wednesday, so that I can think just what to say, and if he asks about you - as he's bound to, being the very polite creature he is - I'll tell him you're no longer interested."

"It will be a lie."

"But he won't know, because you're not going to speak to him about it again." Monica tensed suddenly, and listened, said quickly, "I can hear his car. Don't forget a word of what I've said. You couldn't ruin my chances with Renaldo - no one could - but I won't give you the opportunity of even trying. If you use any more of your underhand tricks to get him alone, you'll wish for the rest of your life that you hadn't!"

The white car swept round the drive. Monica was out in the porch, smiling and holding out a hand, saying something that Gwen could not hear because of the drumming of blood in her ears. She watched them go down the steps, Monica, in spite of her tallness, contriving to look small and innocently happy. As always, Monica had striven for the fragile appearance in order to make the male aware of his own strength.

Renaldo, as he opened the car door and saw her seated, wrenched at Gwen's heart. He looked gay and deliciously dangerous as he said something which was rewarded by a dazzling smile from Monica. Then he said something else and sent a glance towards the house. Monica shook her head regretfully, and after a moment's hesitation Renaldo went round to his seat and set the car moving.

Gwen glimpsed them through the rear window, the dark arrogant head and wide, grey-clad shoulders, and the bright curly hair and clear profile as Monica spoke to him. Then they were gone, and Gwen turned back into the room to get rid of the coffee tray. She felt young and hurt and completely washed out.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

NEXT day, Jose Vidago came to the bungalow in a magnificent blue car which he had borrowed from the Duque. He had turned up each morning at the Quinta to give her a riding lesson, he told Gwen earnestly, and today he felt he could wait no longer to see her once more. Gwen served him the wine Uncle George kept for his few Portuguese visitors and parried his compliments.

They sat in the veranda with Monica, whose presence seemed to awe Jose, so that apart from the flattery he could talk only of horses.

"You ride, senhorita?" he asked Monica politely.

"A little," she said, lifting a delicate eyebrow, "but it's too hot here for riding. Why don't you take Gwen now?"

"Yes, why not?" exclaimed Jose with alacrity.

Gwen shook her head. "Perhaps at the weekend, when Vasco tries his pony again. Have you decided when you're returning to Lisbon, senhor?"

"No!" His dark eyes burned at her. "I cannot think of Lisbon. I am afraid I dream only of riding with you and talking to you. Senhorita ... you love horses?"

"Well, yes," she answered, surprised.

"I have a great wish to take you to see horsemanship at its best - in the bull-ring."

She smiled and shook her head. "I'm too squeamish. I know the Portuguese don't kill the bull, but I wouldn't even like to see the battle."

"But you do not understand. The bull-fight has an effect on one, a tremendous effect! One feels new and pulsing and ... and daring."

"Really?" Monica put in, interested. "I'd love to see the real thing, in Lisbon."

Jose shook his head. "You will not do so with Renaldo, senhorita," he said. "He does not care for the bull-ring."

"Oh." Monica absorbed this and lay further back in her chair. Even for Jose, who meant nothing at all in her life, she was willing to display a trim leg. She was pleased with him for coupling her with Renaldo, particularly as he had done so without forethought and subtlety. "Why don't you walk with Gwen in the garden?"

Jose looked embarrassed. "You are too kind. I had another reason for coming here this morning." He turned towards Gwen that warm dark glance of his. "My mother wishes me to invite you to take lunch with us today. I believe your uncle is at the mission, so I am unable to ask his consent."

Monica said pleasantly, "But you have my permission, Jose. Gwen will be happy to accept."

"And you too, senhorita?" he said deferentially.

"I'm already booked, I'm afraid, but thank you all the same." She slanted a look at Gwen, who sat a yard or so away. "Run along and make yourself pretty, darling. It'll be fun to have lunch with Jose."

Gwen hesitated, but what could she do? Had Monica arranged to visit the Quinta with Uncle George some time today, or had Renaldo agreed to postpone the discussion until tomorrow? Had Jose's invitation fallen like a plum into Monica's lap, so that she could get

rid of Gwen without bother, and give all her thought to the coming interview with the Duque?

A little desperately, she put a question. "Where's your date, Monica?"

Monica flipped her fingers. "I'll let you both into a secret. I'm taking lessons in Portuguese on the quiet from Alfonso Teixeira, the Duque's secretary. Renaldo, by the way, is out today until early evening. I shan't see him till tomorrow."

Gwen relaxed slightly and stood up. But those Portuguese lessons were like a pain, a thin probe touching an open wound. She smiled at Jose, murmured something and went to her bedroom, where she automatically put on the navy linen with embroidery at the neck and pocket.

At about twelve-thirty she drove off with Jose. Away from Monica he was happy as a lark, and having a girl beside him heightened his joy. He drove the long way round, slowed between the cocoa trees, where Africans were pulling the orange-coloured pods, and pointed out that the crop was never-ending.

"It seems that new flowers grow alongside the ripe pods," he said gaily, "and there are seeds in every stage of ripeness and unripeness. It's a circle that widens, the ripe fruit making way for more and still more. Love is like that, I think."

"Like cocoa pods?"

"You must not laugh at me, *querida*." He looked at her anxiously. "You do not object if I call you *querida*?"

"I think first names are enough for the present. How is your sister?"

"She has been out, but she is still unwell. Last night we three dined at the Quinta, but this morning she has stayed in her room. I hope very much she Will be able to have lunch with us."

"So do I," said Gwen, who had visions of ploughing through a meal with Jose at one side and his starchy mother at the other. "Was it a big party last night at the Quinta?"

"But no, there were only us three and Renaldo, and we came away early."

So Monica hadn't stayed at the Quinta the whole day! Then where had she been? She had been missing from the bungalow for twelve hours, and this morning had looked languid and sure of herself. But there was a gap somewhere. She had left the bungalow with Renaldo and quite certainly had gone to the Quinta with him, but at some time during the day she had been taken somewhere else. To the house of one of the Duque's friends? That must be it; Monica would not have mentioned it because she liked it to be assumed that the Quinta was almost her second abode.

Jose chattered on, and presently he drove along one of the tree-lined avenidas at the back of the Praca Condeiro and pulled up outside a tall, elegant house which, in the way of old houses in parts of Portugal, had its fine studded oak door only two steps above the pavement.

He unlocked it and they entered a panelled hall where an old carved table and several chairs drew the eye to the dull gleam of dark wood. He ushered her into a drawing room which was again dark carved wood and tapestry, and his mother beckoned from her chair near the window. She was about fifty and plumpish, wore the usual stiff black dress and pearls, but had a soft glance for Jose. Possibly she was a little less narrow-minded than the usual well-born Portuguese woman, for she seemed quite happy to welcome this young English

friend of her son's. Gwen was cheered; she even managed the meeting with a few words of Portuguese, which so amused Jose that they were all instantly at ease.

For about ten minutes they talked - at least, Jose did, while his mother listened and Gwen thought how lucky he was to have a mother whose love for him was not in the least selfish. She was quite sure that should he decide that he wished to marry someone outside the family circle or even of another race, this mother of his would give in. Which made Julieta's confession that evening at the Quinta rather odd. Gwen hoped the Portuguese girl would come down to lunch.

Actually, Jose had to go upstairs for his sister, and he brought her down. And poor Julieta looked deathly pale and spent. She smiled faintly, ate almost nothing and looked as if the small candle which had kept her going had been blown out.

"You will eat some fish, Julieta," said her mother gently. "Just a little - it is so good for you."

"No, Mama, thank you. I have not been out this morning and am not hungry."

"It was silly of you to wear black, my dear. You are thin and pale - you need colour."

"I am sorry, Mama."

"No matter, child. But eat a little, for my sake."

It was not obtrusive, this exchange on the side, but Gwen was sharply aware of it. She asked, politely, if Julieta was recovering from the infection.

The senhora smiled. "It was not, after all, the same illness as I had myself. Mine was simply the grippe, but Julieta has not suffered the same symptoms. We are hoping so much that it is not the climate which disagrees. Julieta will live here in Mozambique after her marriage."

"She is pining," said Jose with a laugh. "She would soon smile and forget this weakness if Alberto were suddenly to appear!"

Julieta swallowed, and by a superhuman effort remained at the table. The senhora shot a warning look at Jose, remembered her guest and at once found a dish of nuts to offer. But the Portuguese girl's pallor, that downcast look of misery and the mechanical movements of her hands over her plate quite dispelled Gwen's own appetite. She declined the nuts.

They had coffee in the drawing room. Julieta sat with her hands in her lap and said nothing unless she was spoken to. Gwen felt as sick as if the girl's pain were her own. Julieta was in love with a young man in Portugal, but she was engaged to marry someone here in Mozambique, a man she did not love at all. It was scandalous.

Julieta was twenty-three and old enough to choose her own future. No doubt she had grown up knowing that one did not flout one's parents, but there came a time when disobedience might be the only alternative to a permanently broken heart. In any case, in this instance there were two hearts to consider - hers and that of her Miguel. Alberto Ramos, presumably, would have been satisfied to consider any suitable women who might come from Portugal to be looked over. Perhaps that wasn't fair to a man she had never seen, but Gwen felt strongly that this engagement of Julieta's was definitely an arranged thing without a shred of love in it.

And the barrier to Julieta's happiness was the lord of creation himself - the Duque de Condeiro. He had chosen Alberto for Julieta because



all the families had been close in Lisbon and he had remained friendly with the man in Mozambique. He' considered it an admirable match, and had deliberately pushed it to its conclusion while he himself was living in the country. No doubt it was part of a policy he advocated, this finding of Portuguese wives for business men in Mozambique. It was a cold-blooded policy.

When the senhora rose and said she must rest, Jose excused himself so that he could escort his mother to her room. Julieta made as if to move, but then she realized that it would be impolite to leave the guest alone, so she stayed in her chair, and sat very still.

Gwen said, "Perhaps it really is the climate that's getting you down. This overcast weather is a bit overpowering."

"You are very kind," said Julieta formally, "but it is not the climate. I shall not find it too hot in Lourenco Marques."

"Then you're definitely going to live there?"

"But of course."

Gwen tried to pierce the icy barrier. "It's making you very unhappy, isn't it?"

"I am not unhappy, only unwell. You would like some sweetmeats, senhorita?"

Julieta's tone was impersonal, meant to curb Gwen's good intentions. It almost did, but not quite.

"No, thank you. I wasn't being inquisitive. If you remember, you once confided in me and I was terribly sorry that you were being forced to marry someone you didn't care for. I know that for a girl in your position it's awfully difficult to ignore traditions and the fact

that the man you love is poor, but to get what you want in life you have to be brave enough to stand up to people."

"I am afraid you do not understand," said Julieta, expressionlessly. "I am going to marry Alberto Ramos."

"And what about your Miguel?"

Julieta's face became a white and stony little mask. "You will please not mention him."

"You don't mind tearing his heart?"

The moment she had spoken Gwen knew she had gone too far. Julieta swayed in her chair and closed her eyes; her fluttering hand caught the chair arm and somehow she steadied herself. But when her eyes opened again they were murky black pools and the skin below them was purple.

Gwen had no time to say more. Jose came into the room and began talking about the attractions of Lisbon as compared with Cedrillo. After he had thrown out a few hints, Julieta got to her feet, said a distant goodbye to Gwen and went from the room.

At once Gwen said, "You should go with your sister, Jose. I'm sure she feels dreadful."

"Julieta?" He made a smiling grimace. "She is better now, much better than on Sunday when she had not the strength to rise from her bed. It is the heat."

"It's not the heat! She's unhappy about marrying the Ramos man. I'm sure of it."

He laughed at her. "You do not know Julieta. There is nothing she wants so much as marriage, and she admits that Alberto is very

suitable. My mother and I have the deepest gratitude to Renaldo for this marriage. It was he who brought Julieta to Mozambique and arranged for her and my mother to stay at the house of Alberto Ramos. He has done all he could to arrange things happily. Julieta has been a little silly, but she will recover and be a very happy wife. Alberto is rich ..."

"Is that all you think about - whether a man is rich enough to become your sister's husband! Haven't you ever given Julieta an opportunity of stating whether she likes the man enough, or whether she would rather marry someone else? I think this forcing a girl to marry a man you've chosen for her is ... is outlandish!"

He said soothingly, "You do not understand, Gweneta, and it does not matter. Perhaps you will see Julieta a year from now - happily married and much adored. Alberto is very keen for the marriage."

"But what does Alberto mean to you? Julieta's your sister - it's her happiness that ought to count with you — not Alberto's!"

"I love you when you flash fire. Forget about Julieta; she is settled and we are not."

It was hopeless. Knowing that the senhora would not approve of her being here alone with Jose, she gathered her gloves and hat.

"But you are not going home," he said. "We will drive into the country and look at the trees."

"There are trees in Cedrillo," she said shortly. "I'd rather go home."

"But it is so difficult to be alone with you."

"That's just as well. I've enjoyed having lunch with your people, but I really must go now."

"But walk with me a little first, no?" he besought her engagingly. "There will be no one in the streets and we can stroll in the shade. Just-for a few minutes?"

Gwen gave in. They walked along the avenida and round into the Praca Condeiro, sat down at a pavement cafe which was closed and eventually strolled back to the house.

Jose was regretfully opening the door of the car when the long white sports model slipped along near the kerb, to halt right behind them, and the Duque got out. He came to them in a couple of strides, gave Gwen a bow and a speculative stare.

"Renaldo!" said Jose, not a bit put out. "I thought you were away for the day."

"I have been to Beira and got back earlier than I thought. On my way through the town I decided to tell you that your passages are arranged. You leave Lourenco Marques for Lisbon in ten days."

Jose looked flabbergasted, flung out his hands. "I have hardly arrived, Renaldo ..."

He was cut short. "I have also spoken with Alberto on the telephone. He is preparing to go with you. As you know, it was thought that he would follow later, about two weeks before the wedding, but I have persuaded him that it would be better for him to take a long break in Lisbon."

Jose didn't care a fig about Alberto, but he saw an opportunity. "If my mother and sister are to be escorted by Alberto to Lisbon, it would be possible for me to remain here for a while. I find it... very interesting."

"You have your post in Lisbon, Jose," said the Duque off-handedly. "In any case, your mother will need your support." He turned to Gwen. "Why are you out at this hour, *menitia*?"

"I had lunch with Senhora Vidago."

"And now you leave for home? I will take you."

"But, Renaldo," said Jose, outraged. "Gweneta is my guest!"

"It appears," said the Duque coolly, "that you do not know how to treat your guests. Tell your mother I will call upon her later and give her the news from Alberto. Come, senhorita. It is too hot for you in the streets."

Gwen thought suddenly of Monica's threat, but the thought was overcome by a stronger one. She looked at Renaldo standing there with a dappling of sunshine on his dark head, felt his hand already commanding at her elbow. This was the man who had driven the blood from Julieta's cheeks, who had even contrived, ruthlessly, that the man he intended her to marry should accompany the Vidagos to Lisbon and so make sure that the young Miguel was definitely expunged. He was indomitable and heartless, intent only upon his own schemes for other people. He *deserved* a wife like Monica, someone who cared only for his title and wealth!

She hardly looked at Jose as they slipped away from the kerb and out into the avenida. For a minute or two Renaldo drove in silence. Then, as they turned along the back of the Praca, he looked her way.

"Why did you ignore my invitation yesterday, senhorita?"

"Your .., invitation?"

"You were to come with Monica to meet some old friends of mine who had come to the Quinta for a few hours on their way north. You were out when I called for her."

"Yes ... I didn't realize ..." She let it tail off because it had taken a moment to conclude that Monica had kept the invitation to herself.

"And there was Sunday," he said inexorably. "I left a message with a servant that after your ride Jose was to bring you to meet us at the chapel. 'But you drove away.'"

"I didn't know. I wasn't dressed for anything but the ride."

"Monica will have told you that I drove up to the bungalow on Sunday morning myself, in order that I could ask her to bring a dress for you to the Quinta!"

Impossible to explain that Monica was hardly likely to treat such a detail as important enough to pass on. But could it matter now? She was silent.

After a moment he said quietly, with a small smile, "Well, that is past. I will take you to the Quinta now, and when you have rested we will have a talk. The week is over, no?"

"But Monica said that..."

"Yes, as the elder she has a right to discuss this also. I shall see the three of you together tomorrow. But there is no reason why you and I, who are old antagonists on this subject, should not first resolve our own little differences so that everything is clear when we meet tomorrow."

She shook her head. "I don't want to talk about Vasco unless Uncle George is present."

"Then I will give you a little wine and we shall talk about architecture and paintings and azulejos," he said mildly.

"But I can't come to the Quinta."

He must have lifted his foot from the accelerator for they slowed, perceptibly. "You have reasons?" he asked, very evenly.

"Well," her throat was curiously tight, "I don't feel I can talk to you for very long about anything."

"Yet you have talked to me," he said, his manner glacial. "You asked favours for Colin Reed." A pause. "You have now had an opportunity of comparing the advances of an Englishman with those of an impetuous young Portuguese. Which do you prefer?"

In tones which had gone hard with control, she said, "I make *no* comparisons, senhor."

"Yet it seems to me you are more - what is the word - keyed up over Jose than you have been with Reed. How does he make love - this Jose?"

"You can save your satire, senhor. Jose may be a hothead, but that's possibly because he has a heart of some sort. I only wish he would spend some of his feelings on his sister's behalf!"

Renaldo's long fingers gripped on the wheel. He cast her a quick glance, but her head was lifted and she was staring out of the window. He drove on without speaking till they had left the houses, turned suddenly down a lane between the cocoa trees and pulled in.

He turned to face her, his dark eyes keen and demanding. "You will explain that remark about Julieta. I am not so dull that I cannot be aware of the fact that you blame me for something. What is it?"

"It's not my business," she said in low tones. "I only wish to heaven I hadn't gone to the Vidagos' today."

"And what did you see at the Vidagos'?"

"Just a girl who was white and thin and almost on the point of collapse because you had to have your way over her marriage." Reckless and despairing, she looked at him, saw the thinned mouth and white nostrils, the narrowed, glittering eyes. "When Julieta first told me about her un- happiness - that night at your house when you found us in the garden room - she said it must go no further, that I mustn't tell anybody. Well, I haven't ... but today lets me out. I just can't stand by and see her life being ruined just because she has to obey you and her mother ... you, particularly. Her mother might give in, but not you. Oh, no! You have her happiness in your hands . . ."

She stopped precipitately, aware of sudden electricity in the atmosphere.

"So now you are exercised about Julieta!" he blazed. "I have known this girl all my life, yet you have to tell me how I shall deal with her love affairs. I know she is thin and pale, and I know about this Miguel who has made her unhappy. You have learned nothing that is not already known to her family and to me!"

"That makes it worse," she said. "I don't think that being her ... guardian gives you the right to alter her life as you please. I wouldn't have dreamed of saying anything about this if she hadn't been so terribly unhappy, but the sight of her today was too much. You can't do this to her, senhor!"

"I do nothing that is not for her good. Believe that, and say no more!"

"I don't believe it." She swallowed painfully. "I know that many of your marriages are arranged, and that it may be all right for certain



people. But when a girl is already in love with someone else ... then it becomes a crime. If you really cared about Julieta's happiness, you'd help her to marry the man she wants, not thrust her into marriage with some friend of yours to whom you've promised a Portuguese wife!"

His teeth tight, he bent her way. "This is something I can hardly credit! You presume to know more about Julieta's troubles than we, her mother and I. Have you not already acquired enough problems, that you must manufacture others? And you call this marriage we have arranged a crime! But can it be a crime that a man who has decided during a visit to Lisbon that he wishes to marry Julieta shall now desire to make it a fact? Alberto Ramos has great feeling for Julieta; otherwise I would not have countenanced the marriage!"

"But Julieta's feelings don't matter, do they?" she said, stiff with fear of this new Renaldo and yet staunch for Julieta. "How could you bring her here, knowing she was in love with someone in Lisbon? It was callous and self-righteous ..."

"Senhorita," he said, striking the wheel with a clenched fist, "will you be quiet! For a reason which is not by any stretch of imagination your concern, you are making wild and foolish statements about something you cannot understand!"

"Very well, I'm wild and foolish," she said, "but I'd rather be that way than cold-hearted and cruel. You know that in dictating to Julieta you're safe; she'll obey, because she was raised in the tradition of obeying parents and godfather." Reckless in her distress for Julieta, she went on in high tones, "It's too absurd that a girl of twenty-three should have to give in to a man who is only the son of her godfather. If I were Julieta I'd defy you and marry the man I loved!"

"I am sure you would." His anger was annihilating. "The matter of Vasco, who is my godson, I am willing to discuss with you because

you are related to the child. About Julieta's marriage to Alberto Ramos I forbid you to speak another word! You understand?"

"Of course I understand! I'm beginning to know you very well, senhor."

With a vicious twist he switched on the ignition. "You know me not at all. It is sometimes necessary to be a little cruel in order to provide for future happiness, but in this matter, as in the matter of Vasco, I have never been cold-hearted and self-righteous. We will go."

While they were moving there was no further word between them. He drove up to the bungalow, opened the door for Gwen and went with her into the porch. He bowed.

"You have had a tiring day, but the brandy will help you to sleep for an hour." His tone tinged with cold malice he added, "These affairs of the heart - whether your own or some other person's - are wearing, are they not? Perhaps tomorrow you will be less affected by these things and we shall be able to talk more reasonably. Please tell your uncle and your sister that I shall expect all of you at the Quinta at four o'clock." He allowed her no reply, even had she been capable of one. He opened the door of the house. "Go and rest. *Adeus.*"

Gwen entered the small hall and heard the door close behind her. She took a long shaky breath, and then saw Monica standing in the sitting room doorway, her expression bright and hard.

Somehow, Gwen managed to speak first. "He came to the Vidagos' and insisted on bringing me home. He wants to see you and Uncle George at the Quinta tomorrow at four. That's all."

She walked along to the bedroom and locked herself in, sank down upon the side of the bed. She felt shivery and light-headed, and there

was a clamminess in her palms which reminded her of a bout of 'flu she'd once had.

The road to Cabo Ponto ran between low mountains which were fuzzy at the top with scrub and on the lower slopes were carved up into strips of bananas and papaws, mangoes and pecans, with an occasional mandarin grove here and there. Farmhouses were scattered over the hillsides, and Africans were working in the outbuildings and among the orchards.

The station wagon bumped rather alarmingly, but Colin assured Gwen that it was nothing new; the old girl had needed new springs for more than two years. He was more silent than usual, which suited Gwen because she was too dried up, emotionally, to carry on an animated conversation. His occasional comment about the countryside was just enough to stave off the awkward truth - that for once neither had a great deal of interest in the other.

Cabo Ponto, as a village, turned out to be almost nonexistent. There were a few white bungalows scattered in the valley between two great headlands, a native township hidden among coconut palms and a couple of small boats sitting upon a calm blue-green sea; that was all. Colin drove along the rough track which rounded the smaller headland stopped where the slope was gentle.

"This is my land, for what it's worth," he said. "From this road down to the sea and a hundred yards wide. It's pegged out, but you can't see the flags in this bush."

Gwen got out with him and walked a little way into the growth at his side. "It's, a heavenly spot," she commented. "Pity you can't just build a house and cultivate the land."

"No go, honey. Even if the land were big enough to make a living from, I'm no farmer. But with enough money to make good roads through the land and improve the beach as well as build the cabins, I might turn this into a popular spot, even for families. Wives and kids on the beach while the old man takes to the sea."

"Sounds fine. Why don't you launch a company to develop it?"

His smile was even more worn than she remembered it. "When you live in a wagon that's on its last legs you haven't much standing with the plutocrats. D'you know what would happen if I found someone who'd take a financial interest? They'd buy me out - give me a profit on what the land is really worth and smile me out of the door. After which I'd blue the cash and be back where I started."

"Oh, dear." Gwen pulled a few nuts from a bush and tossed them in her hand. "How are you getting on among the cacao? Many pests to destroy?"

"Very few, though there's a kind of squirrel that damages the pods and lets in the ants. I drove some baboons into the timber forest yesterday, but if they come back I'll have to shoot them. By the way, Renaldo has let me choose my own timber and supervise the felling."

"How will you get it here?"

"He says he'll have it trucked over for me while I'm on safari. I wish I could tell him to go to hell."

"Why?"

"Because he's only helping me from some feeling that I'm pretty poor at doing anything for myself. Did Monica tell you that he called me in to have cocktails with them on Monday?"

So Monica had remained at the Quinta at least until cocktail time. Gwen shook her head. "Why should he unbend?"

"He didn't. Whenever I'm alone with him I can tell he hates my hide. I could see when we had a drink together on Monday that he thought I had a nerve even to look at Monica, let alone speak to her. And yesterday afternoon he came among the trees ostensibly to ask how I was getting along with the job. He was in a devilish mood - didn't say much, but at any moment I expected him to flash a glove across my cheek and tell me to name my seconds."

She smiled faintly. "It's strange, but we all seem to be getting on one another's nerves here. Uncle George is the only one who plods along without getting peevish, and he's a doctor with an analytical mind."

"Does your sister get worked up?"

"Sometimes, but it's half my fault."

He said offhandedly, "She's used to getting her own way fairly quickly, isn't she? This having to play up to Renaldo so patiently must be taxing her a bit."

Gwen hesitated. "She says she's in love with him."

He shoved his hands into his pockets and took a further pace or two into the bush, so that he was ahead of her. "She's not," he said without looking back. "She's only enamoured of the idea of sailing among her friends in England as a wealthy duchess. She should have been spanked good and hearty when she was young. It's too late now."

She asked, very calmly, "Do you think Renaldo will marry her?"

"He's certainly shown her more attention than he's shown anyone else in Mozambique. And even while I was in the Quinta he talked about

getting your father and mother out here for a visit very soon. Monica said she would write to them."

"She didn't tell me that."

He shrugged. "Somehow she manages not to say much about anything."

There was a silence, punctuated by the distant rhythmic roar of the waves. Then Gwen said, "You could fall in love with Monica yourself, couldn't you, Colin?"

He gave her a quick look over his shoulder. "Maybe, if she were halfway human. Lot of good it would do me, anyway. Come on, let's eat that picnic you brought, and then we'll find a path down to the sea. If we don't eat too much we could bathe at three. You'll love the feel of the Indian Ocean, Gwennie."

They bathed, dried and dressed in the station wagon and ate a couple of mandarins. They found some sponges and cuttlefish, a small scarlet leafless tree which Colin said was of a type which grew at the bottom of the sea in these parts.

Some jaunts stand out in the memory as bright points of happiness and others are imprinted sombrely on the consciousness against a grey background. This outing with Colin was one of the latter type for Gwen. She was very glad to find herself back at his side, with the wagon moving over the dusty road towards Cedrillo.

Perhaps Colin was aware of the atmosphere of failure. He stopped at his favourite cafe, ordered salads, rolls, wine and coffee, and proceeded to be as lively as he knew how. It was dark now, and the paid guitarist murmured a love-song as he strummed, and a few Africans gathered on the opposite pavement to listen and give wide

white smiles. The tables filled up and the evening became velvet soft under the canopy of cloud.

When they drove off towards the bungalow she felt slightly happier. "Coming in for the rest of the evening, Colin?"

"You'll have things to talk about - you and Monica and your uncle. I'll drop in tomorrow."

"Aren't you curious about the decision on Vasco?"

"Oh, yes." But he sounded absent-minded. "What will you do if it's gone against you?"

"I don't know. It's the way Uncle George feels that's really important."

"Do you wish you hadn't come to Mozambique?"

"In a way - yes. I wish Monica had come instead."

Colin nodded, and said quietly, "It wouldn't be so bad if she'd just turned up married, with Renaldo as your brother-in-law, would it? The brake would have been applied even before you met him."

She looked at him, fleetingly, decided she couldn't talk about it, even to Colin. Lightly she said, "I shan't be here much longer, anyway. There's really no need for two of us."

"You know, Gwennie," he said on a sigh, "you and I could make a go of marriage. If you were in love with me you'd be thrilled to bits over that scheme at Cabo Ponto, and I'd be itching to get started. We wouldn't have much money, but love and enthusiasm can work miracles, even with an old reprobate like me."

"But we're not in love, are we?" she said simply. And then, before he could proceed, "Thank you for the day, Colin. I'm awfully glad to have seen your piece of land. You mustn't give up that idea of yours, whatever happens."

And then with a faint screech of brakes they were at the bungalow, stopping suddenly because the Duque's big black limousine stood there, in front of the house.

Gwen's heart jerked sickeningly, her mouth went dry. She looked drowningly at Colin, but her expression was lost in the darkness. He got out and lifted the picnic basket.

"I'm certainly not coming in," he said. "I'll leave the basket here at the corner of the veranda - tell your boy to collect it. Goodnight, Gwennie. See you tomorrow, maybe."

He was back in the wagon and reversing out on to the road. Gwen went up into the porch, remembered that she had hardly combed her hair since the bathe, and was tempted to run round to the back of the house. And then she stiffened. It had to be faced some time, and how she looked was comparatively unimportant. With one hand clenched in the pocket of the flowered cotton frock she walked into the house and paused in the doorway of the sitting room.

The Duque was standing, as if he had heard her and was on his way to meet her in the hall. Monica sat on the chesterfield, graceful legs crossed at the ankles, a blue silk accordion-pleated skirt draped over her knees, her white blouse fluffy about her shoulders. She looked dainty and well-cared-for, and was smiling gently at Uncle George, who sat in his usual chair near the bookcase; Gwen, she pointedly ignored.

Renaldo inclined his head coolly. "So you arrive, senhorita. We are waiting for you."



"For me?" she said, a little foolishly.

"For you," he repeated flatly. "You have had a good day with Reed?"

"Yes." She moistened her lips. "I... I'd like to tidy up."

"It doesn't matter, darling," drawled Monica, allowing an apparently sweet glance to rove her sister's face. "The tousle and salt bloom on your cheeks suit you."

"We will, however," stated Renaldo, the stickler for convention, "wait while you wash. A few more minutes can do no harm."

Gwen felt like Vasco being sent to make himself clean. For the first time since coming into the room, she looked straight at him. She had expected a trace of anger in his glance, but there was none. He was as distant as the stars, as bright and cold.

"I'll be quick." she said, and went from the room.

## CHAPTER NINE

EXACTLY seven minutes later Gwen came back into the sitting room. She was neat and clean in a plain blue and white gingham and totally without make-up. She smiled a little nervously at her uncle and sank into the chair which Renaldo placed for her, between his own and the chesterfield. Monica was on her left, Renaldo to the right, and her uncle faced them, looking a little worried but doggedly British.

Monica spoke first. "I'd better put the picture to you, Gwen," she said as agreeably as if there had been no hitch in her plans. "Uncle George and I went to the Quinta at four this afternoon and we had tea with Renaldo. We did talk a little about Vasco, but Renaldo thought it only fair that you should be included in the discussion, and I agreed with him, of course. In any case, Uncle George had to make a call at five, so we just took a walk in the gardens and Uncle George went off. A little later Renaldo brought me home, and we've all had a drink together. Would you like one, my pet?"

"No, thank you, I had one with Colin."

A mistake, if ever there was one. Renaldo looked more forbidding than ever.

"At a cafe in Cedrillo? " he asked.

She nodded, thinking bleakly that he could make what he liked of it. "Well, where do we go now?" she asked carefully.

In an icicle voice Renaldo said, "There is little to discuss. I merely wished that we should all be together when the decision is made. Perhaps the good doctor will state his reasons for wishing to send Vasco away to England for his education. I know them, of course, but it would be well to make everything very clear."

Uncle George looked awkward, and threw out one of his blunt-fingered hands. "It's a matter of sentiment, I suppose. Vasco's bright and academically he could go a long way. He isn't old enough to express a choice, and by the time he is old enough he'll be too Portuguese to want to go to an English school and university. In my opinion, he'd be quite happy in an English school so long as he has someone living near who cares about him. Gwen has promised that if he goes back with her she'll make him her first concern."

"And I repeat the promise," she said quietly.

Renaldo said, "It occurs to me as strange - this reliance on a girl who is only twenty. How could the senhorita be father, godfather and grandparents to the child? I am willing to be convinced."

The deuce you are, thought Gwen. But she waited for her uncle's reply.

"Vasco will still have us all here. He'll write to us, come out to us for the long vacation. And I'm sure he'll come to rely on Gwen; he's very fond of her.",

"You are willing to burden your niece with this responsibility?"

"It wouldn't be a burden, senhor," said Gwen quickly. "Vasco is English ..."

"Oh, hardly," Monica broke in, with an innocently indulgent smile. "I've never in my life seen an English boy of the lively type so beautifully behaved. If he goes to an English school he'll lose all that. I know Chesterham School is an excellent one, but do you remember that boy - the Italian boy - at the parents' garden party?" She leant forward with a delicious little laugh, towards Renaldo. "His father was in the diplomatic service, and you can imagine his horror when the boy kicked a ball through the headmaster's window."

"It was an accident," said Gwen. "Vasco is just as likely to kick a ball through a window at the school in Beira."

"It seems to me," said Uncle George, "that we're getting away from the kernel of the matter. The Senhor Duque is not opposed to English schools. He has a right to some say in this matter, and it so happens that he is against sending the child away from our control. Vasco's grandparents cling to him because they have no son or other grandson. I don't want to hurt or upset anyone, but I must confess that I don't care for the idea of the child growing up right away from English people."

There was a brief silence. Then the Duque said, "Supposing one of your nieces were to decide to stay here in Mozambique. What then, my friend?"

Uncle George looked flummoxed. He stared rather hard at Monica's carefully controlled features, then looked at Gwen, and apparently found little inspiration but some food for thought.

"That would alter things, naturally," he said slowly, "though he'd still grow up away from England. You see, senhor, there's the question of his career."

"There is also the question," said the Duque suavely, "of whether the child himself would be opposed to leaving us. What do you think?"

"It would be a wrench on both sides."

"But more for him, I think."

"*Much* more for him," said Monica warmly. "Just imagine how horrid he'd feel at leaving everything and everyone he loves. You couldn't make up to him for all that, Gwen. Could you, now?"

The appeal sounded reasonable, but Gwen was too cold inside to be easily persuaded. "There would be compensations. He'd love the trip on the sea, new sights and adventures. Father is so much like Uncle George that Vasco would soon feel at home..."

"But not with Mother," said Monica softly. "Mother is nothing whatever like any of the women he knows."

"I'd be there."

"But he loves his life here. The visits to his grandparents and to his *padrinho*, his pen full of animals. How can you be so hard about it, darling?"

Gwen's throat was tight, but she refused to be put off by this new act of Monica's. "He'd gather treasures in England just as he has them here. He could take his toys . . ."

"But not his pony!"

Gwen didn't look at Monica. She spoke to Renaldo, without looking at him either. "You're saying very little about it, senhor. It's rather absurd that my sister and I should argue about this when it's a matter between you and my uncle."

"But I am interested in your opposing viewpoints," he said coolly. "Monica states small truths, while you are controlled only by loyalty to your uncle."

"And to England!"

"Ah, yes ... to England," he said comprehendingly, though his eyes were narrowed. "This is something fundamental and much more important than you think, senhorita. It seems your uncle would think again if you or your sister proposed to stay here in Mozambique, which means that he is chiefly concerned to have an Englishwoman's

influence during the child's early years. I do not blame him for that; it is the thing which is lacking in Vasco's young life."

"To me," said the doctor, "it's a serious thing. I'm not able to give Vasco as much time as most fathers can, and once he goes to a Portuguese school I shall lose even the little I have of him."

Renaldo held up a hand decisively. "No! I will not have that. His holidays he would spend always with you, and you would have to give up some of these duties with which the mission has loaded you, so that you could visit him almost every weekend. The child has both languages, so that the one in which he learns is not important. I would say that we enter him for this school in Beira and review the matter each year. You know that his grandparents wish him to prepare himself eventually to take over the Paiva plantations?"

"How marvellous," murmured Monica.

"Yes, I know it," said the doctor. "It's very difficult to know what to do."

Gwen said, a little abruptly, "How does anyone know that that's what Vasco will want to do when he's older? There are three generations of doctors on our side of the family, and he's already showing signs of interest in the profession." !

"Is he?" said Uncle George, with a sudden look of happiness.

This, apparently, was something that even Renaldo hadn't discovered. He looked at Gwen. "How do you know this, senhorita?"

"Remarks he's made - about the guinea-pigs, and a few about various patients. Two or three times he's mentioned a whitlow that his father lanced one day at Senhora Paiva's house. They're only small things, and he could easily change his mind - but the possibility is there."

"It certainly is!" said the doctor. "In that case, it doesn't much matter where he goes to school so long as he chooses Edinburgh later on. Though, of course, it would help if he grew up in England."

"We train doctors in Portugal also," remarked Renaldo with irony. "It seems we have decided nothing - which is just as well." He paused. "I have asked Monica to write to her parents enquiring whether they could manage to come here to Cedrillo in the near future. I understand that your brother is a radiologist, which may mean that if he can engage a substitute it would not be difficult for him to get away. If the answer is favourable, I myself will invite Doctor and Mrs. Crosland to stay with me at the Quinta."

Gwen looked down at her hands and said nothing. Monica, she knew, had put on a shy, tender smile which completely hid her triumph.

"That's very generous of you," said the doctor warmly. "I do hope they're able to come."

"It seems to me the wisest course, for several reasons. I still wish to persuade you against sending Vasco to England until he is older, but whatever our decision, it will do him no harm to know that he is closely related to this English family, so that if the time comes when he has to make a choice himself, he will know these people who will be his guardians there. I am sure you will pardon me if I say that the young senhorita is not enough of a guardian for the child. She is almost of an age to marry, and her marriage would change everything."

"I suppose that's true. How do you feel about it, Gwen?"

She managed a smile. "I knew I wasn't necessary to this discussion. The Senhor Duque has managed this as he does everything, smoothly and inflexibly, but if you're satisfied that's all that matters. If Monica has worded her letter carefully - and I'm sure she has - Mother will

see to it that she and Father come here fairly soon, if only by air for a week or two. I'm sorry I wasn't able to do more for you, Uncle George."

"You've worked your way into Vasco's heart, and that's a great deal, my dear."

"I shall be sorry to leave him," she said.

"Well, you won't go yet. If your parents are coming..."

Gwen shook her head. "I won't wait for them. I want to go soon."

Uncle George began to protest, but fell silent. Renaldo cast a calculating glance at the young figure in the chair to his left, but even he said nothing just then. It was Monica who ended the pause.

With gentle sympathy, she said, "I knew when you came in that there was something wrong. Darling, you don't have to run away from Colin as you did from Howard. I don't know what he's been saying to you today, but whatever it was ... he's not worth breaking your heart over. You were right when you refused to marry him. He's not good enough for you, but quite soon now he'll be going away on safari and you won't have to see him again. I know it's dreadful to fall in love with someone who could never give you a real home, but some time you'll be glad you didn't give in. Colin just hasn't the courage to carry through that scheme of his at Cabo Ponto. Gwen dear, if you really want to go home ..." she let it tail off at that.

The chill which had gripped Gwen as Monica was speaking seemed to have become concentrated in a ball round her heart. She felt a wild impulse to cry out the truth - that Monica had been trying to get her to go home, that Colin's misery was her fault, that she was playing a double game the whole way. But the habit of affection and loyalty was too strong.



"Yes, I want to go," she said. "Have we finished the debate?"

Renaldo rose, tall and austere. Uncle George mentioned conventionally that they would be delighted if he would stay for a meal and received the expected courteous refusal. Monica remained for a minute in her corner of the chesterfield, looking up at Renaldo with smiling blue eyes. The heels clicked.

"I will wish goodnight to you two senhoritas. Till tomorrow."

Gwen had to look up at him. His eyes and mouth were not angry, as she had seen them before, nor did he avoid meeting her glance. He merely gazed at her with an expression of complete and fastidious remoteness.

"There is really nothing more you wish to say?" he asked.

There was so much that her heart and mind were overloaded with it, but she shook her head.

"Nothing, senhor."

"So you withdraw from this little contest?"

"I've no alternative."

"Very well. It is *adeus*."

He bowed, and as Monica got up he moved at her side into the hall. Uncle George was there, and a few more words were spoken; then the doctor went into his surgery and the other two moved out into the porch.

Gwen got up and went through to the kitchen, where the boy was preparing dinner. He needed no help, so she tiptoed to the door of Vasco's bedroom and listened. Silence which meant sleep. She

hesitated, then crossed into the bedroom she shared with Monica, rolled up the dress she had worn earlier and put it with several of Monica's things into a linen basket. She pushed a hand across her brow, walked back through the kitchen and out into the thick dark night.

She walked among the papaws and mandarin trees, tried not to think, but could not stave off the sight of Monica, victoriously lying her way through the little scene in the sitting room. She was wrenched by a cold and helpless anger against the sister who was getting what she wanted at the expense of others. Monica didn't care what she said about Colin nor how much of an idiot she made of Gwen so long as she got what she was after - the admiration of Renaldo de Condeiro and a kind of promise that much more exciting things were in store.

What of the future? How could she possibly face a future ' in which she was related to Renaldo? Could she live in Chesterham with her mother and father, hear his name mentioned to friends, see letters from him, or read letters from Monica in which he figured as the devoted husband? Because he *would* be a devoted husband - very much so. Renaldo's wife, whether he were desperately in love with her or had married only because he felt it necessary to his position, would be showered with attentions and care of every kind. And he wouldn't forget to ask after the little sister-in-law. Not he!

Standing there in the darkness among the aromatic trees, Gwen knew that she had never in her life felt nearer to prostration. She remembered the distaste and withdrawal in Renaldo, the way he had isolated himself from her with a glance, and she thought of Monica going with him to the car. There had been an occasion when he had touched his lips to Gwen's temple; so it was likely that he had gone further with Monica. Had they kissed down there on the path in the darkness?

Gwen had to move; she was beginning to feel ill. She arrived at the back door, her pain almost tangible, a hot probe of a thing that moved about her, touching naked nerves. Somehow she got out a few words to Sezuko.

"Will you tell the master that I have a headache and have gone to bed? He's not to worry - it's nothing."

She got into her bedroom, slipped forward on to her bed. She felt drained dry, finished.

The next few days were amazingly normal. Jose Vidago arrived on horseback and leading the tame filly Gwen had made friends with at the Quinta. He took her off for a lesson, two days running, and on the second morning begged her to go for a drive into the country with him.

"You are not Portuguese, so one does not have to appeal to a duenna. One cannot converse on horseback."

"You're doing very well," she told him.

"But there is so little time. The days are passing so quickly that soon I shall be on my way to Lisbon. Please, Gweneta, give me a chance to know you well enough that we may make promises to each other before I leave."

"No, Jose. I haven't a promise in me."

"But you like me?" he entreated.

"Yes, you're fun sometimes. But that's all."

"But it would be too terrible if we were to part and never meet again. Do you not feel that?"

"I don't think so. It's always happening - meeting and parting."

, "But not to us! It cannot happen to us. Gweneta, just one drive with me?"

"I might go with you - if you'd promise not to talk of love all the time."

"Not *all* the time," he assured her cheerfully. "When shall we have this drive?."

"Just once, before you leave. After the weekend."

"We leave Cedrillo on Monday morning - you know that?"

"Do you? Bad luck." As the filly stumbled on a tussock which hid a small rock, she grabbed the rein more tightly. "Jose, how is your sister?"

"She is better - resigned."

"You mean resigned to marrying Alberto Ramos? Aren't you ashamed that you've done nothing to help her?"

His shoulders lifted prodigiously. "What could I do? Alberto has known Julieta for many years, and even before he left Lisbon for Lourenco Marques he was a little fond of her. Then when he came to Lisbon for a holiday he decided he liked her enough to marry her, but there was still the question of whether the climate of Mozambique would suit her. So Renaldo arranged to bring her and my mother with him this year. It has all turned out well, I think."

"Even though she's miserable about it?" Gwen demanded. "Aren't your girls ever allowed to marry simply for love?"

"But she has much affection for Alberto," he asserted breezily, "and I am told there is a large house ready for her near Lourenco Marques. I shall see it before we sail. Julieta is very fortunate."

There was no stirring him up on Julieta's behalf. If Julieta was so spineless that she would do exactly as she was told, perhaps the arranged marriage was best for her; certainly she would never have had the courage to break away from the family and face life in an attic with her Miguel. Still, the affair was sad.

She finished the ride, shook her head when he again begged her to go into the country with him, and eventually he went off dejectedly astride one horse and leading the other; Gwen entered the house.

It was calm and quiet indoors. Monica, with great daring, had borrowed one of Renaldo's cars and was shopping in Cedrillo, probably with much ostentation so that everyone noticed the car; there could be no mistaking where it belonged.

Gwen made herself a lemon drink, sat down to read an English newspaper which came out weekly by airmail. She was halfway through it when Colin Reed jolted round the drive and halted at the foot of the steps. She got up and went out to him, gave him a smile.

"This is a late tomorrow, but you're welcome just the same," she said. "Why have you given us a miss since Wednesday?"

He shrugged as they came up the steps. "I wasn't around. Didn't you notice I wasn't camped near the river?"

She shook her head and remarked soberly, "I don't seem to be noticing much at all these days. Have you been away?"

"Got fed up with waiting to hear from those people at Quelimane and suddenly decided to go down and shake them up. Appears they were waiting for me to show myself- we start away on Sunday evening."

"That's quicker than you thought, isn't it? Are you glad?"

"Couldn't be gladder. I'll be along tomorrow to bid you farewell for a few weeks."

"For good," she said quietly. "I've written an application for a passage on the next ship to England."

"That's a blow," he said sincerely. "If you get it you'll be leaving next week, then?"

"I hope so."

"What do the folks think about it?"

"Uncle George is a little unhappy, and Vasco refuses to believe I'm going."

"But not Monica," he said shrewdly. "She wants you out of her way, doesn't she?"

"Don't let's go into that. Like a drink, Colin?"

"I've never said no to one yet."

They went inside and she poured whisky and soda for him; and while he tasted and downed half of it' she lit a cigarette. He leaned near the window, looking at her.

"Mission completed?" he asked.

"More or less."

"What's happened about Vasco?"

"Nothing, for a while." She knocked ash into a metal tray. "All we can say is- that by coming here we've brought the matter to a head."

"You and Monica? What did she have to do with it? "

"She agrees with keeping the boy here in Mozambique. She has a right to her opinion."

"But she snarled it up for you, didn't she?"

She lifted her shoulders. "Don't be so anxious to believe the worst of Monica. When you're as fanatically set upon something as she is you're likely to lose your sense of proportion. That wanting her own way is the one direction in which Monica hasn't grown up."

"Well, if she marries the Duque she'll grow up in that way, too," he said with bitterness. "He'll put her right."

Gwen hesitated. "I think perhaps you ought to know that it's practically a foregone conclusion. At Renaldo's command Monica has written to our parents, asking if they'll accept an invitation to spend a week or two at the Quinta. I'm sure he wouldn't get them out here for the reason he says - to allow Vasco to become acquainted with his English relations in case he has to go over and stay with them some time."

Colin's face looked rather grey and tired. "Oh, well, no one can say she's not a fast worker. Got another drink to spare?"

He had set down the glass and turned back towards the window when the silver-grey car slipped round the drive and stopped behind his wagon. Gwen watched him as his glance followed Monica's movements; he did look cynical then, and entirely disillusioned.

Monica came into the house, entered the sitting room and dropped several parcels on to the table. She was wearing white trimmed with dusty pink and a large white hat. Her face was lively, and though it had hardened a little as she saw the other two, the smile remained, a tantalizing parting of red lips. But her glance, as it slid over Colin's careless corduroy slacks and khaki shirt, was bright and watchful.

"Hallo, you two. Conspiring about something?"

"We couldn't compete with you," Colin said. "Is that one of Renaldo's buggies out there? What is it - an engagement present?"

"That's not funny. Colin ... I wanted a word with you."

"I don't want one with you," he said. "I'll get going."

Anger flashed in the blue eyes. "How dare you talk to me like that! If you're unwilling to see me why did you come to this house?"

"I came to see Gwen. If you'd been here as well I'd have asked her to come out with me for a bit. But she was alone, so we had a nice comfortable chat - which is something you've never experienced."

He went towards the door, looked back at Gwen with a half-nod. "See you tomorrow, Gwennie. So long."

Neither girl spoke till the station wagon had rattled away. Gwen took another cigarette, lit it and smoked while she put away the whisky and siphon. She collected Colin's glass and moved as if to go from the room.

But before she had reached the door, Monica said brightly, "What did I interrupt - another proposal?"

"It might have developed that way - you never know."



"Perhaps it was as well I came in when I did." Monica paused, and there was almost no expression in her smooth, regular features as she asked, "You wouldn't give in to him, would you, darling?"

"How would it affect you if I did?"

"Oh, come," cajolingly, "I don't have to put it into words. I've already told you I couldn't have a man of his kind as my brother-in-law. What were you talking about?"

"Odds and ends."

"Well, that doesn't sound very dangerous." Monica was smiling again. "Gwen, guess what I remembered this morning while I was out. If you sail 'next week you'll have your twenty-first birthday at sea! I felt quite depressed to think none of us would be with you, so I had to buy your birthday present right away. Here it is. Do open it!"

Gwen looked at the package Monica had pushed across the table. For a long moment she fought nerves and the harsh lump in her throat, a desire to escape and lock herself away. She won, and managed a smile.

"Why, thanks. I won't open it, though, or I'll have nothing to look forward to."

Monica gave another push to the small parcel and it was accepted. She said casually, "You'll feel much happier in England. Colin isn't really your type."

"He's all right," said Gwen automatically.

"Why are you seeing him tomorrow?"

Had Gwen's brain been functioning normally she would have given a brief pointed reply and saved herself a great deal of distress. But it wasn't, and she merely shrugged, saying,

"Because he wants it and I happen to like him."

She went out, carrying the parcel and the glass. The first she tossed quickly on to her bed, and the second she took to the kitchen, where she remained to give Sezuko a hand with the lunch.

In the sitting room, Monica stood above her pile of parcels with an odd expression on her face. She looked at the ashtray and saw a cigarette end of the kind Colin favoured alongside one of Gwen's, and her brows drew together and her lips tightened. The phone rang and she went into the hall, but it was only an African who needed treatment of some kind; there were never any interesting calls here.

Even Renaldo disdained the telephone for his social communications; still, that could and would be altered.

She moved back into the sitting room, gathered all the parcels but one and took them to the bedroom, where she opened each and gloated over its contents. Continental lingerie, a little white box coat hand-embroidered in a beautiful pattern down the centre of the back and round the hem, a dream of a white handbag made in Lisbon, a box full of nail varnishes, a crystal bottle of bath oil.

Then she noticed the packet lying on Gwen's bed, and the tiny frown came back between her brows.

At lunch-time, Monica gave her uncle the present she had bought him - a pair of leather slippers to replace his own beloved and disreputable slops. It was only when she saw the round happy face of the little boy as he enjoyed his cold chicken that she remembered he

had been left out of her calculations. Still, he had plenty, and she'd really bought as much as she could afford.

That afternoon, Gwen took some sewing into the veranda. She had looked through her clothes and decided to run up a couple of extra blouses for the trip home from a couple of lengths of brightly patterned silk she had once been tempted to buy in Cedrillo. Sewing, she found, was like gardening - it took most of one's attention and left little room for thought.

She was glad to see Vasco coming round the house, carrying a small cardboard box. She smiled at him, asked to see his treasure and squealed when he lifted the lid to disclose two baby striped mice.

"They can't see yet," he said interestedly. "Did you know that all things are born blind?"

"I had an idea they were. Where are you going to put them?"

"I'd better have a cage, hadn't I? Jacomina - you know, my grandmother's maid - she keeps birds and she might let me have a cage. I'll have to ask her."

"Where are you keeping them now?"

"I thought we could put the box on the roof of the guinea-pigs' hutch. Will you come?"

She went gladly, helped him to arrange the box as he wanted it. They were closing the wire gate when Renaldo came upon them. He must have approached quietly, for the first indication of his presence was a cool and smiling comment addressed to Vasco.

"You have an assortment here, *pequeno*. They appear to live in amity and should be a lesson to us."

"Tio Renaldo!" the boy exclaimed. "I have the mice - two of them, and they are the sort that will be happy in a cage. Papa says so. He says these striped mice hardly run about at all and they'll get nice and fat if I feed them grain."

"You may try keeping them," Renaldo said, "but if they seem unhappy you must set them free."

His glance did more to collect Gwen's wits than her own efforts had done. Silently he was saying, "You see, senhorita, I do understand how freedom is necessary to some things . . . and some people."

"If Vasco's farm grows much more we shall have to transfer it to another part of the garden," she said quite steadily, in spite of the fact that Renaldo's hand was at her elbow as she turned to the path..

"It is good for a child to have such an interest," he said. "We must see what else we can find for you, Vasco."

He walked beside Gwen but spoke to the child most of the time, gravely discussing meerkats and wild dogs, tortoises and leguans, the kinds of food they ate, their habits and needs. At the veranda, he ruffled the dark curls.

"Go about your business, little one. I am sure it is very important."

Vasco gave him a frankly adoring smile and ran off. Gwen stood very still, wondering if Renaldo had come here today for a purpose, or whether he had merely been interested in what was happening to the car he had lent. He reached up and broke off a spray of pink trumpets from a climber, flicked an ant from his fingers and tossed the spray down on to the earth. It wasn't a typical action from Renaldo; his thoughts, Gwen was sure, were a long way from flowers.

She said, "I'll be getting tea now. Will you come in, senhor?"

He shook his head. "It is good of you, but no." He looked down at her speculatively. "Jose Vidago leaves Cedrillo early on Monday morning. Did you know?"

"Yes, he told me."

"And Reed, I understand, is to leave us even earlier — on Sunday. You will be lonely - no?"

"I don't think so. I shan't have time to be lonely."

"You have other plans, of course. I wonder why you are so anxious to return to England? There was this man — the musician. Your sister told me a little about him."

She averted her head and replied, "It doesn't have to be a man, senhor. You once told me I wasn't old enough to have a love affair. I believe you're right." A brief pause. "Would you like me to call Monica?"

The smile he turned upon her was sharp and did not reach his eyes. "Do not disturb her, please. I go into the country to spend the night with old friends, and I thought I would call on my way. I have arranged with the owner of the Cafe Castanhetas for an orchestra tomorrow night, and I would like you and Monica and your uncle to have dinner with me there. The car may remain here for your use - yours and your sister's. I will call for you tomorrow at about eight."

"Very well, senhor."

"There is nothing you wish to say - even about Vasco?"

"Nothing at all."

On the point of moving away, he paused and studied her face. "You are pale again ... and a little unhappy. It is very foolish to be unhappy about such people as Colin Reed!"

"I'm not unhappy about Colin."

"Because you have exchanged promises, you two?" he demanded swiftly.

Suddenly Gwen realized she was near tears. She shook her head and mounted the first step to the veranda.

*"Adeus, senhor."*

Possibly it was the first time in his life that Renaldo had been dismissed by a woman. He stiffened, bowed, and was gone from the range of her vision. She heard his car start up and reverse on to the road at speed; then he was gone, and Gwen found herself slumped against the house wall in a soundless surrender to grief.

On Saturday morning, Monica paid her first visit to Vasco's grandparents when she took him for his usual call. She drove him in the big grey car, came back flushed with success; Senhor and Senhora Paiva, it seemed, had been overjoyed to make the acquaintance of this young English woman who actually agreed that Vasco should grow up in Mozambique.

After lunch she rested for an hour, and then took down the lilac and black evening gown from its hanger and tried it on. She looked superb in it, would be superlatively beautiful by the light of chandeliers. It was odd how well she could look in lilac so long as it was combined with some other colour; odd but gratifying. She had

just put the dress away again when Gwen came in and went to the cupboard for her sewing.

Monica said, "I'm clearing out, so if you'd rather sew in here you may."

A concession which Gwen accepted without question, though after Monica had gone it did occur to her that the generous gesture was unusual. However, she sat down and began to stitch a collar.

Monica went to the sitting room and teetered a little before taking up a magazine and finding the fashion pages. For some time she gave undivided attention to the detail of photographed clothes, and then she read a story and thought how drab and ordinary it was compared with her own. But she was one of the fortunate ones, one of the very, very few who really did meet and marry a prince!

She heard someone in the porch and looked out of the window. Oh, dear, that young Portuguese who seemed to have gone tiresome over Gwen. Still, he did have an air, something that Englishmen had to do without. And there was a possibility he might be useful.

She said sweetly, "Come right in, Jose," and popped back to greet him as he entered the room.

He bowed over her hand, murmured, "*Como tu es bela?*" in his most daring tones, and kissed her fingertips.

"Is this how you behave with Gwen?" she queried archly. "Jose, if only you were staying you'd awaken that sister of mine to the fact that there are other things in the world than one's duties!"

"Your sister is here?" he asked politely.

"Yes, she's sewing in the bedroom, but you don't mind speaking with me for a minute, do you?"

Jose prostrated himself. "How could you think it? It is only that I have always thought of myself as below your notice."

"I know, and it's silly." Monica looked at him through half-closed lids, and a thought came to her mind. "Are you dining with us tonight at the Castanhetas?"

"No, unfortunately. My mother and sister are packing, and we say farewell to Renaldo tomorrow at lunch." He looked sad. "It is very hard to leave this country - for me, I mean. Senhorita ... I care very much for your sister."

Monica's first impulse was to show him that she took this for what it was worth - an overdose of flattery for Gwen. But she resisted it, and said, "I'm so sorry for you, Jose. You haven't been able to see her very often, have you?"

"And when we do meet," he said dejectedly, "she is like quicksilver. One cannot grasp her at all. I mean that," he added seriously, "only as a matter of speech."

"Of course," Monica appeared to think it over. "You know, in spite of being Portuguese and warm-blooded, you're rather slow. We English are only slow on the surface - haven't you realized that?"

"But no!" he said, amazed. "I have always thought of Gweneta as a cool flower, someone who is only slightly stirred by whatever happens. She is exciting to me, she is quick-witted, but there is a coolness within. She is untouched and untouchable."

Monica laughed as if this conception of her sister were very funny. "She's not like that at all. Or only superficially. You won't find an English girl anywhere who isn't yearning for someone to take command and sweep her off her feet, and Gwen's no exception, I



assure you. Her head is full of dreams. Poor Jose! You'll never find it out for yourself, will you?"

Jose sat forward with one brown hand clenched into a fist on the arm of his chair, his eyes sparkling as he met Monica's veiled blue glance. "I have thought it could be so - that she is shy and wishes me to take command, but with our girls we are careful. It would not do to hasten a relationship unless one were given permission by a parent. But you English are independent, are you not?"

"Very much so - to our cost! No one believes that we're simply aching for high-powered romance. Jose, did you have any special reason for coming here today?"

He nodded. "Tomorrow I shall be very busy with the final details of our departure, but today I am free. Gweneta promised that she would go for a ride into the country with me on Monday but I shall be gone, and I was wondering...'

"Yes?" she said, very kindly.

"I wondered if she would come with me now! We could go to another town for tea, and I would bring her back in time for the dinner at the Castanhetas."

"Is that really all you hoped?" she asked.

"Perhaps a little more," he confessed with his most devastating smile. "At a place called, I believe, Manato, there is a *torneio* - a kind of bullfight. I am told there is an event which anyone can enter, and I hoped so much that I could show Gweneta how one manages a horse and a bull in Portugal."

Monica tapped her chin, meditatively; her brain worked quickly. "You know that Gwen hates the idea of bullfights? I'd love to see one myself, but she wouldn't."

"But these *torneios*, I am told, are not real bullfights - only demonstrations of skill," he said eagerly. "I will try to persuade her that she will see no cruelty."

She shook her head. "You couldn't get her back in time for dinner."

As she had known he would, Jose leapt to the challenge. "It shall be done. I give my word!"

Monica smiled at him. "I think you could do it, but you'll never persuade Gwen to go. She may have read about the *torneio* and recognize the name of the town."

He gave a deep sigh, "What is one to do? I would give anything to take her merely for a ride in the country, for one hour."

"But that's a waste," she said playfully: "Once you get her in the car you can take her anywhere. Jose," she assumed a stern gravity, "if I help you a little, will you be very careful?"

"Senhorita," he answered earnestly, "I will obey you to the letter!"

Monica was deliberately unhurried. "I'll call Gwen and we'll coax her to take a short ride with you. Whether or not you decide to go as far as Manato will be up to you. I can only advise you."

"And I want your advice!"

"Then don't mention bullfighting! And don't be too ardent before you get there. Be as English as you can to start with - and then, when you've arrived at Manato and managed to persuade her into your bullring or whatever it is, you can be as masterful as you like."

Remember, Gwen can't keep up the coolness for ever, and she does like you a great deal. If you're as daredevil on a horse as I imagine you are, she won't be able to resist you!"

With emotion, he said, "I can never thank you enough, senhorita!"

Monica went into the corridor, called, "Gwen dear, someone to see you - Jose."

She came back and smiled gently at him, looked round as Gwen came into the room, the yellow-gold hair a tender cloud about her face, her flowered dress billowing slightly from the narrow waist.

"Did you come to say goodbye to us, Jose?" she asked.

"In a way, yes," he answered as he faced her. "Would you be so kind and go with me for the little ride you promised for Monday?"

"Wouldn't you rather have tea here with us? My uncle will be here soon."

"You did almost promise, Gweneta," he begged. "I have less than two days here now."

Gwen gave in almost without a struggle. "We could have tea and then go out for half an hour."

"But it would be sweeter to have tea' somewhere else today. Please consent!"

Monica said nothing. She merely sat back watching them with a completely benign expression on her face.

Gwen smiled. "All right. Just give me time to powder my nose and comb my hair. You shall take me to the river and I'll count the orchids to see if any more have opened since I saw them last."

She went off, and Monica exchanged a long glance with Jose. He looked anxious and unbelieving, but Monica appeared calm and satisfied. Her demeanour had not changed when the two had gone, but she got out the local newspaper and read the weather report which she had laboriously waded through as an exercise in Portuguese while she rested after lunch.

It said, "Fine and mild, except in mountain regions. In districts Cherri and Manato, there will be widespread mist and drizzle in the hills, but it will be overcast without rain in the valleys."

It was four o'clock. Even if Gwen resisted Jose's efforts to get her to watch the *torneio*, Monica calculated that it was unlikely they could get back in much under four hours. And they were due at the Castanhetas at eight. Monica relaxed.

## CHAPTER TEN

Jose did not drive down to the bridge they knew. There was another much more fascinating on a road he had travelled only yesterday, he said, and he made for it, and happily pulled in so that Gwen could see the lilies and wild orchids and vines trailing over the grasses and winding up into the trees. Then they set off again, and Gwen did not take much notice of where they were going.

It was cloudy again, and blessedly cool. They passed through a forest of jungle thickness and then the road rose and the air was cooler still with just the faintest hint of moisture in it.

They climbed and were shrouded in mist so that he had to go slowly, and then they travelled over a drenched road full of holes and boulders. But Jose was serene. They were on the road to Manato, which was in a valley. Mists and fine rain had a habit of clinging to the mountains.

It was five-twenty when they ran into Manato. Gwen mentioned the time. "Just a short drink and away again," she said. "We're dining tonight with the Duque."

"We came the long way here," he said, "because you were anxious to find a river. It will take no longer than an hour to return. Let us have wine and taste the pleasures of this town. You will do me this favour?"

"You're so sweet that I have to say yes. I wish it were raining here."

"If it were we could not explore. Ah, here is a cafe after my own heart. And what a good name it has - Os Tres Macacos!"

"What does it mean?"

"The Three Monkeys - those well-known wise ones, I should say. Come."

They sat at a table just outside the lighted cafe window, drank red wine and ate a few crayfish snacks. The inevitable guitarist was playing to an increasing crowd in the streets, strolling and singing with a fervour that seemed to come from the soul. The night was warm in the valley and humid, but there was no sign of an evening star. Jose chafed a little.

"Let us join these people and find out where they are going. Perhaps we shall be lucky enough to find a *festal*"

"But we haven't time for it, Jose."

"Just a little," he begged. "See, they are gathering at the end of this street. I would say there is something worth seeing if we could get near to the square. We might get through."

He took her hand and made sure that they did get through. Lights were swinging crazily overhead, dozens of them attached to poles which were being pushed by the crowds. A modern set of floodlights illumined the centre of the square, and there came a tremendous roar from the throng.

Gwen could see nothing, not even the brilliant excitement in Jose's expression. She tried to drag her hand from his, but he held on, drew her forward so that she was in front of him, and then pushed her upon to a stand at the back of the ring. With people milling about her, she turned and looked down into a vast earth-floored ring, where already a bull stood lowering and waiting for a horseman to appear.

"Jose!" she exclaimed. "I can't watch this. We have to go!"

But Jose had entered another dimension. He stared, entranced, at the bull. "Senhorita," he entreated with bated breath, "this is the true excitement of one's blood. You must watch, and presently I will go down and challenge the best they have here. I, Jose Vidago..."

She wrenched her hand from his. "I'm not staying! Jose, you're mad. I have to be home before eight - don't you realize that? It's already six-thirty!"

"Just for half an hour," he pleaded. "I must show you how these things should be done! Why else would I bring you here?"

She was fighting away from him and from the crowds that pressed about her. "You brought me here purposely!" she cried. "How could you do that? I couldn't bear to watch a bull fight, and you know it. Take me back to the car at once!"

"Now?" he said, in utter disbelief. Then, remembering Monica's injunction to be masterful: "You will sit here on the stand and watch. I command it!"

"And I command you to take me back to the car!"

He weakened. "Gweneta, this is my only chance of showing you that I can ride with the best *torneador* in this country! You must wait."

"I refuse," she said flatly, and began struggling down from the stand.

She pushed her way among Portuguese and Africans, heard Jose's faint cries for a while and then lost them completely. The crowd thinned and she hurried faster and faster, till she was half-way up the street through which they had come. But was it the same street? Gwen paused and looked back, saw no Jose and nothing else that she recognized. Was it possible that there in the crowd they had pushed half-way round the square, and she had escaped by some other road?

She stared at the crowds and the lights, decided it would be wiser to find a main thoroughfare and look for the car.

But it was a strange town, like and yet unlike Cedrillo. There were cobbled streets, open shops selling plaster animals, oil lamps, flowers and old gramophone records; no air of refinement here, no modern shops and well-dressed shopkeepers, no elegant women and upper-crust men. They had no duke here to set the tone.

She did find the main street, through, and after a search she came to Os Tres Macacos. From there it was only a few steps to the car; but the car was locked, of course, the keys in Jose's pocket. Gwen stood there, feeling a little sick. Surely, when he realized that she had no intention of staying to watch the spectacle, he would come straight to the car? It was the sensible thing to do. But Jose was not in a sensible mood. He had brought her here deliberately, had even put on the brotherly act in order to get her this far. At the moment he was probably feeling so frustrated that he didn't care what happened to her. Yet courtesy to women was ingrained in him; he would surely come running to the car at any moment.

She waited, dully conscious of a stabbing pain above her ankle, where the tiny heel of some *senhorita's* shoes had bitten into the flesh. She looked down and saw the wound, black-looking and wet, and she thought, idiotically, that it couldn't help but show through tights.

Someone spoke to her, smiled whitely. She shook her head and he passed on, but the incident was frightening. Should she speak to the proprietor of the cafe - or was it only fair to wait a little longer? If possible, she would avoid trouble for Jose, but he was certainly asking for it. She wished her head hadn't begun to ache.

Ten more minutes passed, and many more curious glances, though most people were too intent on the quest for excitement to give her



much attention. Gwen came to a decision and crossed the road towards the cafe.

Monica dressed slowly and luxuriously. The dress was a dream, her titian hair was falling into its most bewitching waves, and she felt like a million. There were other things to be glad about, too. Since Gwen had gone out no one had called; there had only been a message from the mission, saying that Dr. Crosland was detained there on an emergency operation and would not be able to dine with the Duque. Which was all to the good.

Monica came into the sitting room and poured lime and soda which she laced with gin. She did wish this last half-hour would pass more quickly. There was still the risk that Colin would call.

Why hadn't he come here to see Gwen today, as he'd promised? He'd promised before and not come, of course, but he'd sounded as if he'd meant it. Perhaps he'd decided to call in for supper; yes, that must be it, but...

She got no further because the wagon sounded out on the drive. She set down her glass on the hall table, straightened, so that when Colin tapped and came in she was there, a regal figure in lilac silk overlaid with black lace, her shoulders bare, her neck slender and encircled with a double row of pearls between which small diamonds glittered.

Colin stopped abruptly, and perhaps for the first time in many years a dark colour came up under his tan. He took off the old hat with the leopard-skin band.

"Very effective," he said briefly, and walked past her into the sitting room.

She joined him, nodding towards the drinks. He shook his head, put on a cigarette without offering them and looked her over once more. He was still wearing the corduroys, but his shirt was clean and he was newly-shaved.

"Where's Gwen?" he asked abruptly.

"Out. She went for a ride with the young Portuguese and hasn't yet returned."

"With Vidago? I didn't think she liked him enough to go out driving with him in the dark."

"Jealous?" she drawled.

"That's right," he said flatly. "I'm jealous of any man who captures a nice girl. There are so few of them."

"Now you're being nasty."

"Not particularly. I could be nastier than that." He nodded at her dress. "Is that for His Highness?"

"Yes. We're dining and dancing at the Castanhetas. My uncle was invited, but he's held up at the mission. Pity you're not accepted at the Quinta; we could have made a foursome."

"Thanks for nothing." He took a pull at the cigarette, drew in a lip. "I wonder what Renaldo would say if I told him how you spent last Monday evening, after we'd left him. An evening with a tramp by the river, a few kisses..."

"He wouldn't believe you," she said swiftly, "and there was only one kiss! Colin, you gave me your word..."

"Oh, sure," he said dispiritedly. "But, God, how I feel like blasting everything wide open. Did Gwen tell you that I leave tomorrow for Quelimane?"

"She mentioned you were leaving soon."

"You were glad, of course."

"Yes, I was. Do you want me to say goodbye to her for you?"

"What does that mean - that I'm not to see her again? Couldn't be," he asked with sarcasm, "that you're a little jealous yourself?"

"Of Gwen ... with you?" Her smile was contemptuous. "Perhaps you'd better realize that I only spent a couple of hours with you on Monday because I was bored. That heavy wit of yours is wasted on me."

"Not entirely. I'm the only person you know who shows you just the sort of person you are. It hurts a bit, doesn't it? That means you're not yet completely warped - you're pretty far gone, but there's a thin ray of hope for you yet. You know, you and I have one thing in common - we both had a gift of money at a time when we should have been struggling, and it spoiled us." He paused, said softly, "Tell me, Monica, when did you first begin to feel I was the sort of chap you could fall for?"

After a second's discomposure, she was calm and detached. "You're crazy. I'm just wondering what you'll think up next."

"Not so crazy. You came here all set to hook Renaldo. No one told me - I just know it. Then you met me, and if you'd been honest with yourself you'd have admitted that something snapped into place. Bad luck that the one time you really felt uncomfortable round that little stone you have for a heart, it should be over someone so utterly

unworthy and unable to give you the things you think important. I don't suppose it's occurred to you once since you came here that I've hated myself for the waste of years behind me. But I've hated myself even more for loving someone so completely without a single decent emotion."

She cast him a hasty glance and for a moment looked oddly uncertain of herself. "Are you trying to tell me that you're really in love with me? I must say that your way of showing it has been most peculiar. Even when you kissed me it was as if you detested it."

"I felt bitter - couldn't help it. If you'd been anything like Gwen I might have asked you to throw in with me so that we could start a new life together."

"You'd have the nerve - with nothing to offer?"

"What have you to give, anyway?" he asked, pressing out his cigarette with a hard thumb. "You have looks, but they won't last for ever, and you certainly won't be a beautiful old lady because beauty in age depends on character." He shrugged as she drew a sharp breath, and went on, "You're sophisticated and know a good many tricks, you have dress sense ... but you don't have a thing that can't be taught in a charm school. You're never sincere - you never even try to please anyone unless they have something you're after, and then you put on your best act. In fact, taken all round you're a pretty thin type."

"But you're in love with me," she said tightly. "I'm as bad as that, but you'd have me if I were willing. How dare you!"

"You're not so frightening." His glance at her taunted. He lowered himself to the arm of a chair. "Mind if I wait for Gwen?"

"Yes, I do. Please go at once!"

"I intend to see her. It's my last chance before she leaves."

"I won't have you stay here," she said unevenly. "I'll give Gwen a message for you. In any case, I shall be called for soon and Gwen may not be back by then."

"Why shouldn't she? She knows about this date at the Castanhetas, doesn't she?"

"Naturally, but if something hadn't happened she'd be back already and dressing." A split second after she had spoken Monica saw her mistake, and hastened to repair it. "I don't mean that anything horrible could have happened. Perhaps Jose has a flat tyre."

But Colin was standing, had taken a pace closer to her. "What are you hiding?" he demanded. "You know where they are, don't you?"

"No, of course not." She turned her head from him, listened intently for a sound from outside that might divert him. "They'll come soon."

"Where are they? Come on, tell me!"

She was shaking a little. "Don't shout like that, Colin. It's just that Jose wanted to say goodbye to her alone. He's taken her to Manato, that's all. Maybe there's a mist or something on the road and they have to take it slowly."

"You're darned right, there's a mist!" Colin, who seldom got angry, was seething. "I get it now. You had two or three reasons for getting rid of Gwen for a few hours, didn't you? And one of them wasn't unconnected with me. That twisty little mind of yours saw that Gwen and I might make a promise to each other - to correspond, perhaps to meet in England. You couldn't bear that because you were imagining something quite different between you and me. Nothing would stop you marrying Renaldo, but ..."

She clung suddenly to his arm. "Colin, please," she implored him, the words tumbling over each other. "I ... I could love you, but don't you see how it is? I can't give this up. I can't! But you and I will be happy together, whenever you're in Cedrillo. I'll invite you myself to the Quinta, and everything will be ..."

She stopped, waiting, but he was silent and utterly incredulous. With that in his eyes which made her feel spineless, he stared down at her, and at last he let out an imprisoned breath.

"So I was right," he said quietly. "You want it all ways. You sent Gwen off so that we shouldn't meet again, and you're hoping Jose will keep her out so late on the road that she won't butt into this evening of yours with Renaldo. After all, it shouldn't be difficult for you to keep her away from Renaldo for her last few days. That's the way you think, isn't it?"

"You're being absurd! I didn't want her to see you, but why should I care if she sees Renaldo?"

"Because she knows you, and he likes her. You're terribly afraid of Gwen, really ..."

She gave a short hysterical laugh. "Of Gwen! You're mad. It's just awkward having her about all the time, that's all. She'd come between me and Renaldo if she could, and she's half in love with you. Can you wonder that I want to discredit her?"

She turned away from him, but he caught her arm. "So that's it! In one swoop you accomplish everything. I told Gwen she must be careful about you, but she made excuses for you. Neither she nor I had the least notion of how far your precious ambitions could carry you, but at last you've come out into the open . . ."

"Colin! You wouldn't say anything? If you did it could ruin my life!"

"It would probably be the best thing that could happen to you, you selfish, vicious little fashion-plate!"

But Monica had stood enough. She dragged her arm from his grasp and faced him, teeth tight and her eyes brilliant with tears of fury.

"You beast!" she panted. "You've been longing to speak to me like this, and you do it now because I'm alone and unprotected. You fell in love with me and it maddened you to know that you hadn't a dog's chance! You had to stand by and watch events, and humiliation got the better of you. I believe you knew Gwen was out, that you came here to get this off your mind. Well, you've said it. Now go!"

He pushed past her, and the next moment was facing Renaldo. Monica's breath caught noisily in her throat and her face fell forward into her hands. Renaldo's expression was angry and demanding. He took Monica's arm in a firm hand, shot a query at Colin.

"My faith! What is happening here?"

Colin shook his head slightly as if to jerk sense into it. His tongue moistened his lips and he moved towards the door. "Ask Monica," he said.

But Monica decided to sway against Renaldo so that he had to hold her and lower her to a chair. Renaldo gave her a handkerchief, turned again to Colin.

"Explain this, Reed! You reduce a woman to tears and say nothing?"

Colin shrugged. "There's not much to say, senhor. As you know, I'm leaving early tomorrow for Quelimane, and I came here to say goodbye to Gwen. I found she was out, and I accused Monica of sending her away purposely."

"It's not true, Renaldo, it's not!" Monica sobbed. "I was worrying about Gwen's being gone so long, and that's why the least thing Colin said upset me. I couldn't help it if I was angry with him."

"You are worried about your sister?" said Renaldo quickly. "Where is she?"

Monica hesitated, and it was Colin who spoke. "I'll tell you, senhor. She's gone to Manato with Jose Vidago — a little farewell jaunt, I understand."

"Manato! But there is rain and fog in the hills. In bad weather that road quickly becomes useless!"

Monica smiled up at him tremulously, her eyes beautiful with tears. "Jose wanted her to go to a bullfight with him. I knew it wouldn't be right for them to go alone and said they must only take a short drive. But Jose isn't dependable. He might have persuaded Gwen."

Renaldo's eyes speared through her like twin swords. He turned again to Colin and spoke rapidly. "Reed, I would like you to do a service for me. Telephone the Cafe Castanhetas and cancel the table I reserved for this evening. After that, you will please inform the good doctor that the little festivity must be postponed." In a stride he was at the door. "I do not pretend to understand just what has occurred this evening, but I intend to find out all about it later!"

He bowed automatically to Monica and she put out a hand.

"Renaldo, please don't leave me."

"I have no choice!"

He was out in the hall when she called, "But where are you going?"

"To find your sister!"



Seconds later his car sped down the drive. The two in the sitting room listened, Monica with a cold and trembling fury and Colin with a sharp-eyed, cynical pleasure.

"There goes your dream-boat," he said softly as he stood in the doorway. "He didn't even see that pretty dress you're wearing. All he saw was a car splattered over a wet road and yellow hair stained with blood. I'll make those telephone calls for him from a cafe. So long, angel. Drop me a line when you get to England."

The car skidded gently across the loose wet stones, righted itself and at once jolted sickeningly through a washaway. The wipers whirled backwards and forwards over the windscreen, clearing two arcs in a grey wetness. Through them the shimmering beams were visible, picking out the endless red mud road flanked on each side by low bush. The sight of another car in a similar predicament would have been heartening, but there was no other traffic, nor even an occasional light from a farmhouse.

Once more, while he clung to the wheel, Jose tried to excuse himself. "I cannot blame myself enough for this, senhorita, but how was I to know the road could be so bad? It has not rained heavily, yet the gravel gives way beneath the wheels. After this you will despise me for ever!"

Gwen was cold, but she managed a smile. "Don't worry about it, Jose. Just get us back to Cedrillo. I only wish you'd mentioned where we were going when we set out, that's all."

"I mean it to be so exciting for you," he lamented. "It seemed to be the very chance I needed to show you how much I want you to admire me. When you ran from the bull-ring I was distracted."

"I just couldn't stay. I took the first street I saw and found the car. I must have left the car again just before you reached it. I went to the cafe and tried to get someone to bring me home in a taxi."

He groaned. "I could kill myself!"

"It's not that shattering. You don't know what a relief it was to find you at the car when I returned to it. Manato, it seems, has only a few taxis, and they were all in demand for the *torneio*." She paused. "I still can't understand why you took me there. I've told you several times that I couldn't bear to watch a bullfight."

"And I have told you in return," he said despondently, "that there is nothing to upset the nerves in the way we fight bulls in Portugal. I had seen a leaflet about this *torneio* in Manato and saw there was a challenge for anyone to accept. I so much wanted you to see me in the ring!"

"I'm sorry, but I wouldn't have enjoyed it."

"And now you are cold and hungry and we still have many miles of this malevolent road before we descend from the hills. I am not fit to live!"

"We'll get there. Just keep going."

But the road became more and more difficult. The thin rain must have been falling all day, for now the water seemed to have seeped below the surface of the road, leaving it treacherously loose in spots. Earlier, in daylight, the dangers could be seen for several yards, but now darkness hid the wide patches of mud and clay and occasionally they ran over exposed tree roots and rocks. If Gwen had not felt fatalistically certain that there was not much worse that could happen to her she would have found it distinctly wearing. As it was, she sat

beside Jose and told herself that every yard travelled was a yard nearer Cedrillo.

Then suddenly the thing then both feared happened; part of the road was under water. He braked, changed gear and with a word of supplication trod hard on the accelerator. Too late, he saw a great boulder standing out in the centre of the road, swerved, and ran into a quagmire at the side of the road. The wheels whirled, the car remained stationary. Jose switched off. "One can do nothing," he said hollowly. "I truly am not fit to live."

"Someone will come along," she said, not very confidently. "Even on bad nights people have to travel for various reasons."

He let out a prodigious sigh. "I cannot hope that you will forgive me, but please take my coat. I insist."

After she had the coat round her shoulders he was quiet. Gwen shivered. She could feel the little wound near her ankle throbbing away like mad, and there was a throbbing in her head, too. It was after eight; everyone would know she was out with Jose. His mother would be displeased, her uncle, Renaldo ... better not to think about Renaldo. Once she was out of this mess she would arrange to leave Cedrillo at once. She could go to Beira or Lourenco Marques, wait there for a ship. That was what Monica had wanted, of course.

She asked quietly, "Did my sister know you were taking me to the bullfight?"

He nodded gloomily. "She knew it was what I wished and warned me not to tell you first. She thought, as I did, that you would forgive when you realized that I did it because I wished only to impress you."

"But she must have known it would take several hours."

"Oh, yes. But this appointment you had with Renaldo was for eight o'clock. With a little luck it could have been managed."

Gwen pulled the coat closer about her and was silent. Jose leaned on the wheel and stared ahead, utter dejection in every line. Time ticked by slowly and then suddenly he straightened.

"Look, Gweneta, a long way ahead where the road turns. Do you see lights?"

"Yes, it's a car."

"Then we will stop it. I turn on the beams ... so . . . and I will stand in the light and wave!"

Which he did, though-getting wet out there wasn't really necessary, for the oncoming car was Renaldo's, and he would have stopped, anyway. The black car drew level on the road and Renaldo was out in the rain, his face pale in the glowing darkness.

He almost wrenched the door from its hinges. "You are unharmed, *pequena*?" Then, assured that she was, he blazed round upon Jose. "What was this madness! You go through the mountains without enquiring whether there is mist or rain? You take the senhorita where you would not dare to take even your own sister without her mother's permission! Answer me, Jose!"

"Renaldo, it was my last opportunity. I knew nothing about the roads ..."

"Enough, you imbecile!" Renaldo's rage was only slightly checked when he turned back to Gwen. "I will take you in my car. You wear sandals? Then I will carry you!"

The violence of his mood was almost tangible. Gwen hardly breathed as he lifted her and carried her across the road, set her down inside

the car; but she could feel the electric heat of his anger, the cruel drag of his fingers as he drew the jacket from her shoulders and flung it at Jose. She found herself wrapped in a rug, jumped at the slam of the car door, and she heard him say savagely,

"No, Jose, I will not take you with me. You will stay with the car and I will send someone to extricate it from the mud. For the rest, I will deal with you tomorrow!"

Then he was behind the wheel and backing up, so that he could turn. They sped away at a pace which must have left Jose gasping, after his endeavours to keep the other car going.

About ten minutes later Renaldo gave Gwen one of those smiles which leaves the eyes hard and narrow. His tone placed a wall between them. "There is no doubt an explanation for this plight of yours with Jose. I would like to hear it."

"I expect you've heard it already, from others," she said steadily. "Jose asked me to go for a drive with him. I agreed ..."

"That was wrong!"

"Not by my standards. As a matter of fact I rather fancied a drive to the river, but Jose had other ideas. There was a *torneio* in Manato, but I knew nothing about it till we reached the ring. I did a foolish thing. I ran away and we lost each other."

"*Deus!* You ran wildly about the streets of a strange town? I can hardly believe it!"

She smiled faintly. "It wasn't so terrible. My chief worry was that it might annoy you if I didn't turn up this evening." She sat up straighter. "Why aren't you at the Castanhetas?"

"It is cancelled," he said brusquely. "As soon as I heard that you had gone to Manato with Jose I followed."

"I suppose it's not much use saying I'm sorry to have worried you?"

"Of no use at all. Your sister knew about this bullfight."

"Yes, but our getting stuck was no one's fault. Monica left it to my common sense, and poor Jose didn't know that your roads could disintegrate so alarmingly. Except that I've spoiled your evening and Jose will probably be sneezing tomorrow, there's no harm done."

"No?" he said with icy politeness. "That is good."

For some time after that nothing was said. She looked at his profile, saw it set in a stern mask and felt the heavy, aching sensation come into her throat. It was safer to look out at the speeding trees. She could see the scatter of lights that was Cedrillo, realized they were by-passing the town.

"Where are we going?" she asked quickly.

"To the Quinta."

"Is Monica there — and Uncle George?"

"No."

The negative was so uncompromising that Gwen couldn't think of a thing to say. They swept along the private road, through the gateway and up the drive, under the arch and round the courtyard, where the fountain played on as if there were no problems anywhere in the world.

As the car stopped in front of the massive entrance she stirred herself. "I'm hardly in a condition to go visiting, senhor."

"We have much to talk about," he said coolly. "But now that you are here there is no hurry. First you will wash and then we will have dinner."

She went with him into the pillared hall, said helplessly, "It can't be right for me to be here like this."

He looked down at her sharply. "Are you limping?" Then, on his knee beside her ankle: "You were hurt in this stampede in Manato! Why did you not tell me? Is it not enough that you allow others to force you into situations you do not want?" His fist went hard into the other palm but instead of the explosion she had expected, there was a hand at her elbow, forcing her through a door and along a corridor to a bathroom which was so splendid that she thought, hazily, that it could never be used. But there was a medicine cabinet there.

Renaldo drew forward a stool for her, knelt and attended to the little gash with warm water and antiseptic. He dried it gently and pressed a dressing over the spot, while Gwen sat there looking at the top of his dark head, at the wide shoulders in the white dinner jacket, at his hands, so deft in spite of their size. She was possessed by a sick longing to place her hands on his shoulders, to lean forward and touch her lips to his brow.

As he finished he looked up with dark, smouldering eyes. "No pain?"

Lots of pain, but not of the kind he meant. She shook her head. "Thank you, Renaldo."

He stood. "There are towels here. I will wait for you in the library."

He was gone, and she washed, blindly, in cold water. She combed her hair at the toilet table, looked at the array of beautifully cut crystal jars with eyes that were hot and heavy. Then she came out into the corridor, heard the opulent swishing sound as the door closed

seemingly of its own volition. She walked the thick carpet, hesitated at the open door and went into the library.

Renaldo stood at the desk, but as she appeared he replaced the telephone he had been using and seated her. He went to the table which held decanter and glasses, poured some wine and gave it to her before half-filling a glass for himself.

"Well," he said, a crisp austerity in his tones, "we have time for a short talk before dinner. Until a few points are disposed of it is impossible for us to understand each other. First, I must tell you that I overheard part of a conversation between Monica and Colin Reed this evening. It appears your sister has been your enemy."

The glass trembled in her hand and she set it down. "No, of course she hasn't. If you heard Colin being horrid, it was because he's really in love with her ... and it hurts."

"You knew that?" he asked at once. "Is that the reason you have been so unhappy?"

"I haven't had time to be unhappy for Colin."

"But for yourself? You like this Englishman very much - you have said so."

"Well, so I do, but Colin hasn't become important to me. There have been other things."

"What other things?" His eyes were almost black now. and brilliant. "Tell me about them."

She floundered. "Well, chiefly Vasco. I know that's all over, but it has been a big thing to me."



"I will not believe that a child - a small cousin - can be more important than your own heart. You were attracted to Reed. I know it!"

"I was not!"

"Then why did you go with him to Beira?" he demanded. "Was that the act of a girl who has no feeling for a man? I believe he was the first in whom you took interest after that affair of yours in England. And that, too!" He appeared to be goading himself back into a fury. "You have loved lightly, it seems. The heart is questing and cannot settle. It has even touched upon Jose Vidago!"

"Is this an inquisition?" she asked bitterly, "or are you parading my failures for your own edification? I'm an idiot and I know it. Let's leave it like that."

"I cannot!" he exclaimed. "You are the most rash woman in the world and I cannot allow any more of it. You may have contempt for our customs, but I will force you to obey them. Such an incident as this one today must not happen again!"

"You may be sure it won't, senhor. Tomorrow being Sunday, my uncle will probably be free to take me to Beira. I'll stay there till I can get a passage."

Renaldo towered over her, hot with rage. "So now you will stay alone in Beira! It is beyond belief! But you need think about it no longer. You are not leaving Cedrillo." He drank some wine quickly, thrust the glass away from him. "Whether you wish it or not, you will stay with us till your parents arrive."

"But you can't keep me here against my will. I'm not one of your women, to be pushed around as you think fit, and I've already

endured quite enough. You may have control of Vasco's destiny, but mine happens to be my own. I refuse to remain in Cedrillo!"

As he stared down at her his nostrils were thinned and white. "And I refuse to let you go. Already, this evening, I have been nearly out of my mind with anxiety because I knew that Manato road and Jose, who had your life in his hands, did not."

She quivered. "Yes," she said uncertainly, "you must have worried or you wouldn't have come to us. I hadn't thought of it quite that way. I ... I'm very sorry."

"You say you are sorry, and that is an end of it, ha? Now that you have apologized you can defy me in any way you please. I am not to treat you as a Portuguese woman, I am not to condemn your recklessness. I am the autocrat whom you will disobey whenever you can." Control had cooled his tones till he sounded rigid. "Apparently you were not curious as to why I should be insanely jealous of all the men you have ever known. Normally you are interested in everything, but that particular fact means nothing. Is that so?"

She gazed up at him, bewildered and mesmerized by the look in his face. She took a tight hold on the arm of her chair and got to her feet, and then looked at him again, her pulses racing with fright and unbelief. She shook her head, without meaning.

"Has it not occurred to you that I invite your parents here for a purpose?" He drew a sharp breath. "I wish to see your father, to tell him that with his permission I will try to make his daughter love me enough to marry me."

"You mean Monica," she said faintly.

"*Not* Monica! I could not love that sister of yours, and in any case she is of age, and a letter to your father would have been sufficient, in

the first place. She is a lovely shell, your sister; all her fire is in her hair, but yours ... yours is in the heart and mind."

"Renaldo," she whispered, scarlet-cheeked, "you can't realize what you're ... implying. I'm not anyone ... just myself."

"How I know that!" A muscle jerked just above his jawbone. "I dislike your independence, I cannot bear to have you fight me about everything, and I know that you are young and unawakened and seeking. It is not how I wished to fall in love - believe that! I have waited too long to be satisfied with so little. But if we can only understand each other I will be patient. More than that, no man could promise!"

Gwen groped; the floor seemed to be hinged, and she thought, deliriously, that it must be the wine. "I don't want to fight you," she breathed. "I only want to love you. But it's all so ..."

He was very close, holding her wrists. "So what? Tell me, *querida*."

Her eyes were misty and sweet. "So ... unexpected," she said, and was suddenly weak with a heady, melting happiness. "You did say you want to marry me?"

"More than I have ever wanted anything!" He bent over her, added indistinctly, "I love you, *minha cara*. It seems I have loved you all my life, and more each day, so that often your words have been as sweet as grapes, and sometimes they have pained till I must hurt you also. I have told myself I would wait till you see *me*, and not the tyrant *padrinho* of Vasco, but nothing improved! In fact," with a fierce sigh, "things have daily become worse. You do not know what it does to me - this feeling that I am no longer Renaldo de Condeiro, who can do' as he pleases with everyone!"

She laughed, lightheadedly. "Oh, but you are the Senhor Duque - very much so. Renaldo ..."

The rest was lost as she moved into his arms, felt them brutally tight about her. He murmured in Portuguese, kissed her throat and her mouth and murmured again. When he tried to hold her away from him she was so painfully shy that she clung with her face to his jacket. And he laughed, exultantly and tenderly.

"I never dreamed of this," he said, sounding so foreign that she had to listen acutely. "You should have given me a tiny inkling, a thread of hope! Instead, you stick to these British guns of yours - Vasco must be educated in England ..." He stopped, and said softly, incredulously, "Do you know what I have just learned, at this moment? For me, your uncle can please himself about Vasco. I care not a fig, except that I would wish the boy to be as happy as possible."

"Really?" She did look at him, then, rather soberly. "To be honest, now that I know Cedrillo, and the set-up here I don't think he'd be entirely happy in England. If... if I'm staying ..."

"And nothing is more certain!" he put in, touching her hot cheeks with his fingers.

"Then we must leave things as they are. Uncle George did say that if Monica or I were to remain in Mozambique he wouldn't mind so much about Vasco going to the school in Beira."

"But we stay in Mozambique for only half the year, perhaps less as you have parents you might wish to visit in England. I must write to these parents of yours at once, and demand that they leave for Mozambique by the first plane!"

She laughed helplessly. "You can't do that to an English doctor, Renaldo, but you can be sure that Monica's letter will have prepared them." Thinking of Monica, she felt a tremor along her spine. This was going to be death to everything she had worked for. Strange and sad, to be thinking of her as "poor Monica". That her own heart should be brimming with happiness seemed terribly unfair. She said softly, "I wish Monica would love someone ... genuinely and deeply."

"You know," he said with a whimsical inflection, "I think she is more than half in love with Reed, and his uncaring treatment of her may be just what is necessary to kill that conceit of hers. Me, I could not say to a woman what this Englishman said to Monica!"

"You've been angry a few times with me, though. You're just more polished and aloof about it!" She paused and shook her head. "I can't see Monica ever marrying Colin."

"At the moment, *amorsinha*, neither can I. But we will take a hand in this - you and I. Monica, I think, will soon return to England, but she will not hasten into marriage. When Reed ends this safari, we will get him established down there at Cabo Ponto, perhaps in a bigger way than he intends. You, my pigeon, will faithfully report his progress to Monica and I. .. *not you* . .. will persuade Reed to write to her himself. In arranging the future of others one can only go so far, but something may come of it."

"I do hope so. You're so very generous, Renaldo."

"So?" with a look that blended long-suffering with mockery. "I did not feel generous when I found you on that road with Jose. During that hour when I drove towards you I lived a thousand deaths, and I vowed that not another night would pass before I . . . shook you alive to the way I feel about you. There is a limit to one's toleration!"

She gazed at him with love and delight. This was Renaldo, her own beloved; she was free to gaze at him with all heaven in her eyes . . . and she did, with the result that for quite some time there was hardly any sound in the room save that of his endearments.

At last he said, "The servants will wonder if we are coming for that dinner I ordered. You must be hungry, my dear one."

"Not very. Before we go, Renaldo ..."

"Yes?"

"A little while ago you said we could only go so far in arranging the future for others. Yet you went the whole way for Julieta, and I still feel it was monstrous. She's so much in love with the man in Lisbon that you can't possibly make her marry your friend, Alberto Ramos."

He withdrew slightly. "You must comprehend this. Julieta had been much sheltered and an unwise marriage could wreck her life. She is feeling much better now."

"But you believe in love," she protested. "And she's not in love with Alberto Ramos."

His shoulders lifted. "It is not for you to be distressed for Julieta, therefore I will explain a little. She was almost ready to marry Alberto, excited about it, I believe, when she met and became infatuated with this Miguel. They could hardly speak together, and so it was by letter that their friendship ripened. Miguel, it seemed, had a pen which dripped honey, and Julieta became infatuated. It was because of this infatuation that I brought the two Vidago senhoras here to Mozambique with me. It was time, I thought, that her marriage should be arranged."

"But how can you be sure that it was only infatuation?"

"It is best to convince Julieta that it was so. You see, Julieta, like any young Portuguese girl, was watched closely. I was consulted about this young man who studied law, and made enquiries. He was writing love letters to several young women of good family and hoping very much that one of them would have a weak parent who would allow marriage and give him a good background. You understand? In his young and serious fashion he was an adventurer. You see now that Julieta was brought here for her own good."

Gwen absorbed this. "That sort of explanation never occurred to me. She was still yearning for him after she had seen Alberto again."

"That was unfortunate," he said offhandedly. "I advised her mother in Lisbon to tell Julieta that her Miguel was a sham, but the mother could not bring herself to approach the matter. I myself had to be frank with the senhorita only a few days ago, as soon as she was well enough to bear it. Immediately I arranged that Alberto Ramos should accompany Julieta to Lisbon - to keep her thoughts occupied with other things. Take my word for it - when she is officially betrothed she will be happy over the preparations for her marriage. It is best so."

"I think I do understand," she said. "No wonder Julieta looked so wretched that day I went there to lunch. Why didn't you tell me all this when we quarrelled about it?"

He leaned closer, said tersely, "I was so heartily tired of all these things which came between us, and it was one more! I could not endure to make it an issue. For the business of Vasco's disputed place of education I can be eternally grateful - it brought you here! For the Colin Reeds and Jose Vidagos I am afraid I can feel only exasperation and contempt."

"And Monica?" she said quietly. "You were very attentive to her, Renaldo."

He lifted an arrogant shoulder. "I was glad she came, very glad, because there could be nothing indiscreet in inviting you both to the Quinta, whereas while you were alone here I had to be sure the doctor could also be present. But you let Monica come alone; you cared so little!"

"It wasn't that." She thrust away the memory of Monica's threats; they were so empty now. "Do you remember giving her a pink jade charm?"

"Certainly I remember it. She admired it when I showed her some pieces, and I put it straight into her hand. Then she said she would have it set with a gold link in order to attach it to a bracelet, so I naturally had it done for her. It was disconcerting that she should accept such a gift, but I could see no alternative."

"Didn't you *want* to give it to her?"

He smiled charmingly. "I am afraid not; with a Portuguese woman it would have been misunderstood. You know how it is with these absurd Portuguese customs. It is polite, when a thing is admired, to say, 'But take it, to please me. It is yours.' That is all I said to Monica. She accepted."

Gwen laughed. "That had you."

His smile was tender. "To you I say, 'Take Renaldo and the Quinta, the Castelo Condeiro in Portugal, all he has.

They are yours!' And I am not being merely polite." His tone lowered and became vibrant, his eyes burned darkly. "I have longed to load you with gifts, and now at last I may begin. I love you so much, my little golden rose. I will love you always . . . always."

"You've never called me Gwen," she said foolishly.



"Many things, but not Gwen," he told her. "For me, you are Gweneta Maria, *minha aureasinha*."

"It's a lovely name."

He kissed her fingers. She looked at his hands and adored them, thought of them holding her life, taking care of it for both of them. She felt a breeze through the window, smelled the garden flowers and heard the gay note of a bird that couldn't sleep. There was so much more that she wanted to talk to him about, so much that seemed urgent and a little frightening. Colin and Monica, her mother and father, Uncle George, Vasco ... But it was all safe in Renaldo's keeping; she knew that.

She felt him take her shoulders, felt the need in him and knew a need herself which was like pain. Soon they would go from this room and face everyone, but for this long moment there were only the two of them, Renaldo and she, in a world made up of the rustle of leaves beyond the win- down, a softly glowing light, the old book-lined walls and the single star which shone brazenly out there in a cloud-rift. A star of promise.